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# *The* NEW TERROR

GASTON LEROUX

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**T<sub>HE</sub> N<sub>EW</sub>**  
**T<sub>ERROR</sub>**

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"My cry was torn from me by the vision of Cordelia's form . . .  
rising between us at the moment when our fingers  
were pressing the triggers . . ."

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# *THE NEW TERROR*

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*By* GASTON LEROUX

AUTHOR OF "THE PHANTOM CLUE," "WOLVES OF THE  
SEA," "MISSING MEN," ETC.

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# **THE NEW TERROR**



# THE NEW TERROR

## CHAPTER I

### MY BETROTHAL TO CORDÉLIA

**O**UR parents as good as betrothed us from our earliest infancy. When I was twelve and she was eight, our friends used to remark that we made a charming couple, and our mothers were lost in admiration of us. We would gladly have been married at once we were so fond of one another. We were first cousins, and were often brought together at holiday time. At that period Cordélia had already given me her heart, the budding heart of a little maid of eight.

I was a tall, sturdy boy for my age with a fair, almost reddish-brown complexion, passionately devoted to every form of sport, but idle in the school-room. Life in the open air was the one thing that attracted me. Cordélia, who possessed an inclination for reading and the arts, acquired her taste for outdoor life from me. Her mother was Italian. My uncle had married her during a business trip



to Turin. When Cordélia was eight years old she was a talented musician, but she surprised us still more by the facility with which she drew or painted anything which interested her or struck her fancy. As for myself, whatever came from her hands seemed to me in the nature of a marvel.

I loved her all the more for her gifts and I bestowed on her unstinted admiration. It was I who taught her how to ride. She knew no fear. Sometimes she gave me a fright, but I could not choose but follow her, and she did with me as she pleased. I was never a dreamer. Once she said, "Let us dream," and I pretended as I stood beside her to dream, meaning thereby that I kept silent. Then she eyed me with a queer expression and burst into laughter.

"Kiss me," she said.

I tried to kiss her and she fled.

We made merry in this way until I was nineteen. I had become a tall, strongly-built fellow with a freckled face. She considered me the handsomest of men. She always considered me the handsomest of men.

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She herself had become beautiful beyond words. The slenderness of the unruly young girl had given way to a form of ideal elegance and charm. She was neither fair nor dark. The color of her hair, which I called a fluffy radiance was all her own. Her eyes were green, flecked with gold, whose shades were ever changing. And then her graceful figure! She was as supple as a reed as the saying is, but by no means frail.

We continued to amuse ourselves like children.

Nevertheless one day we took each other by the hand and went thus together to our parents asking them to consent to our marriage without loss of time. We were filled with a wild desire to go for a wedding trip on horseback. Our parents, to our infinite sorrow, refused to listen to us. They postponed our trip on horseback for five years from then, and packed me off to America, which seemed to me a cruel and bitter mockery. And then I returned for my military service. And after that I was dispatched to America once more.

## CHAPTER II

### THE PORTRAIT

**M**Y father who was an iron manufacturer intended to take me into his works, but first of all he was bent on my undergoing a complete course of study in one of those Technical Institutes in the United States where one is supposed to learn everything that can be useful to a mechanic and an engineer, but where the practice of every form of sport is a particular and glorious feature. I may say that I was the pride of the Institute though I was the greatest dunce in it. Boxing, tennis, golf, riding, swimming, boating, into which I fiercely threw myself, diverted my thoughts from Cordélia without making me forget her.

I counted the months which stood between me and the happiness that awaited me. Meanwhile my father and mother were carried off almost at the same time during

an epidemic of influenza, as it was then called. I fulfilled their wishes by making no attempt to precipitate the course of events. They were of opinion that I ought not to marry until I reached my twenty-fourth year. I had no desire to thwart them, particularly now that they were in their graves.

My uncle's attitude towards me in the circumstances left nothing to be desired. He took upon himself the management of my business affairs. I was relieved from all trouble, notwithstanding that both my father and mother had left me a considerable fortune.

He asked me if I wished to take up the succession to my father's business. I answered that I would readily have done so had such been necessary, but since I was left with sufficient means to insure the happiness of Cordélia and myself, I had made up my mind to live, in my own way, upon my income.

He assured me that I would soon become bored unless I engaged in some work. I answered that I had often felt bored when I was engaged in work but never when I was not working. My uncle's ideas belonged to a

different age which did not realize how full life is nowadays. I mean full of the movement which brings with it health and beauty. An athlete is never bored.

For that matter, the argument that I am advancing on the subject of work is by no means necessarily that of a "sportsman." I have heard a man of considerable intellectual power, an author—a novelist who worked his ten hours a day—declare that he had a horror of work because work swallowed up the best part of his time, leaving him no opportunity of seeing life which was a marvelous occupation and a spectacle tedious only to imbeciles. He looked upon work as an ignominious necessity to which mankind had been doomed for some transgression or other, and he considered that those mortals who by the favor of the gods were absolved from it, and yet clamored for it because time hung heavily upon their hands, were deserving of eternal punishment.

For my part, I hold the same opinion and I add: If they are feeling bored, bless my soul, let them play football.

At length I reached my twenty-fourth year, and I sailed in the mail steamer to Havre. I already pictured to myself Cordélia waiting for me on the pier. I had not seen her for eighteen months. We had never ceased to write to each other with the greatest freedom. And yet during the last period of my stay in 'America I seemed to perceive some change in her.

True, her heart still remained mine but her mind had become unsettled; in other words I did not comprehend everything that she said in her letters. I have mentioned that Cordélia had always displayed an inclination for the arts and in particular for painting. Well, it was in connection with a small painting that she sent to me, a portrait of myself painted from memory, which I considered a splendid likeness, that she wrote extraordinary things which I scornfully called, without quite knowing why, a "deterioration," for they appertained to a sphere of knowledge in which we were not accustomed to wander at my Technical Institute.

I said to myself: Cordélia thinks too much.

It is high time that I was home. You bet I'll make her give up her books and painting and music, and then to horse! as in the good old days.

But let me return to this portrait and in regard to it I will refer to my "notes." I am not, to be sure, one of those persons who write their recollections from day to day. But I rejoice that I possess these memoranda, and I will explain how they came to be made almost without my noticing it, and why I happened to keep them.

I am very methodical and have always kept a strict record of my expenditure. I still have my little account books. Thus in the evening after casting up my accounts for the day, I used to sit gazing at the figures before me and dreaming of Cordélia, and I seldom closed the book without setting down some thought about her, or adding some comment upon her last letter.

These were often very simple remarks. For example, I find this entry under the date of the 25th April, 19——.

"Thirty-five dollars ten cents . . .

Dearest Cordélia, we shall have heaps of beautiful children crowding round our knee." Or else a few words even more simple still. Under the date of the 30th May of the same year I find:

"Twenty-five dollars ten cents . . .  
Dear, dear, dear Cordélia!"

Here are my observations concerning the portrait:

"To-day I received my portrait painted by Cordélia. It is a speaking likeness. It is complete in every respect, even to the scar which I still bear under the right eyebrow, caused by an unlucky fall against the corner of the stairs when I was eight. The wound bled copiously, and I call to mind Cordélia's sorrow, for we had been playing together. I feel certain that when she portrayed this little scar she remembered that unfortunate mishap with some feeling. Dear, dear Cordélia!"

A month later I wrote the following note:

"What is happening? I have received a letter from Cordélia and can make nothing of it. She asks me to return the portrait. She considers the painting unworthy. I don't quite



follow whether she considers it unworthy of me or unworthy of her. Moreover she declares that while it resembles me it is not like me. What is the meaning of this fantastic language?"

And still dwelling on the portrait which, however, I was careful not to return to her because I was delighted with it, I wrote:

"Cordélia says in her letter that I ought to understand that a portrait should represent something more than the mere lineaments of a person; for instance, it should convey the expression of the soul and in so far as the soul is not expressed in a portrait, it expresses nothing at all!"

Well, I was quite at a loss. I did not understand how she could materialize my soul which was a thing essentially unseen. Had she meant by her words that it is indispensable to put life into a portrait, I should agree with her, and all that is needed for the purpose is a certain touch of animation in the expression of the eyes, but to depict the soul . . . ! I shall ask her to explain what she means.

I pass over various comments expressing

surprise at the tone of other letters from Cordélia which, moreover, were becoming very brief and few and far between. I am eager to arrive at Havre . . .

And here I was at Havre again.

Alas! Cordélia was not waiting for me on the pier.

On the other hand an old man-servant of my uncle's came to meet me on the *Titan*, which was a small steam-tug engaged in the pilot and post service, and I learnt that Cordélia and her father had set out two days before on "an urgent journey abroad."

Though I was physically hardened by my devotion to sport, I could not restrain my tears, for the news was so unforeseen and coincided so little with my expectations, that I felt a presentiment that some irretrievable calamity had befallen me.

## CHAPTER III

### VASCOEUIL AND HENNEQUEVILLE

**I**T was not that I entertained the slightest doubt of Cordélia's love, but I fancied that my uncle was no longer favorable to our union, and had contrived the journey in order that I might understand for myself a position which he would have found hard to explain by word of mouth.

"Have they gone away for any length of time?" I inquired in a trembling voice.

Old Surdon, the man-servant, who was never a gossip, gave me to understand by a gesture that he knew nothing.

"Where have they gone?"

Another gesture in like manner to the first completed my discomfiture. Surdon, however, without undue haste drew a letter from the inside pocket of his coat.

I snatched it from his hand, opened it, and read:

**"MY DEAR NEPHEW,**

**"We find ourselves suddenly compelled to leave for abroad. I have to deal with a matter which, as you may readily imagine, is of the utmost importance. We shall not remain away longer than we can help, but I scarcely think that we shall be able to return for a couple of months. We shall frequently write to you through an indirect channel, because I am anxious that you alone should know where we are. Be careful to keep the secret of our whereabouts to yourself. Don't worry about anything. Cordélia still loves you; and you will be married before the end of the year. Look forward to seeing us at Vascoeul where I am sending my servants. Surdon will be your servant."**

**While this letter and the remark, "You will be married before the end of the year," reassured me as to my uncle's purpose, it greatly perplexed me as to Cordélia. "Cordélia still loves you." What was the necessity to add those words? Moreover, the letter filled me with a vague misgiving for a number of reasons. What was the meaning of this mysterious journey, and why should I receive tidings from him through an indirect source?**

Most of all, why should I be packed off to Vascoeuil?

My uncle and Cordélia were in the habit of spending the summer at Hennequeville, where they owned "Clos Normand," a splendid estate on the main road to Honfleur. It was a huge, entirely new structure, by which I mean that it was built some fifteen years before, and possessed the most important thing in the world—modern comfort. Vascoeuil, on the other hand, which we used to visit once during the year, at the beginning of the hunting season, was a large country house not devoid of a certain style and charm but antiquated and lacking in well-nigh everything that makes life easy.

This manor house had always produced on me a peculiar impression, with its high, colorless walls, its tower at one of the extremities casting its reflection in the chill waters of the river, its great neglected courtyard, its dilapidated out-houses, and its ill-kept grounds whose moss-covered paths gave forth an odor of decay.

The rooms in the house with their paintings

from which the freshness had departed, and the faded mirrors, seemed to be haunted by shades which our annual visit disturbed. I have never been a believer of ghosts, but Vascoeuil invariably gave me an uncanny feeling.

Strange to say, Cordélia rather liked the place and found "poetry" in it. When I began to analyze my feelings, the apprehension which Vascoeuil caused me seemed to be explained by the fact that I was a man of sound health and well-balanced mind, and everything round me which failed to correspond with these solid realities was unendurable. Vascoeuil was not a "healthy" place. That was enough to make me take a dislike to it.

My dislike was still further increased when I found myself there with old Surdon and Mathilde, his wife, but without Cordélia.

I have mentioned that Surdon was never a gossip, but Mathilde was in the habit of giving free play to her tongue. She had known us from our infancy and was very fond of us; and for years had spoken with delight of our future marriage. I had no sooner arrived than, taking her on one side, I asked her without beat-

ing about the bush to tell me the meaning of the whole thing.

She heaved a sigh and turned on her heel. I ran after her and caught her by the skirt. She began to cry:

"I swear, monsieur, that it's nothing," she said, wiping her eyes. "It was the master's idea to live here. He did not ask our advice, you may be sure."

"Well, if it pleases him, let him come here instead of running about all over Europe and taking Cordélia away from me. As for myself, I shall clear out."

"Where to?"

"Hennequeville."

As soon as I uttered the word Mathilde betrayed the utmost excitement.

"No, no. Your uncle wouldn't be pleased if he heard you were at Hennequeville. He has taken it into his head that you mustn't go there."

Mathilde was a native of Darnetal in the Rouen district. That meant that she was artful and obstinate. I saw that I should get nothing out of her. But I made up my mind

to go to Hennequeville. I reached the place next day. It was about six o'clock in the evening when I got there.

Heavens! how pleased I was to see the country and how delightful the grounds were! In truth, with the glossy and luxuriant verdure of the meadows, and the sweet-scented hedgerows in full bloom, there was nothing ghostly about Hennequeville. And yet when, at the turn of the road, I came in sight of the empty house, my heart was filled with anguish. Never before had it greeted me with such a vacant look. Its shuttered windows and locked doors made a strange impression on me.

How remote it all seemed from Cordélia's laughter and kisses and the welcome I used to receive when formerly I crossed the beloved threshold. There was no echo of the olden time. The house no longer knew me. I lay my head heavily on the garden gate and thus I remained for I know not how long, a prey to the gloomiest dejection.

Darkness had fallen by now, and when I looked up I was not a little surprised to perceive a few steps away from me a dark form



which I might have taken for my own shadow, its posture so exactly resembled my own. The shadow also heaved a sigh. I was struck dumb with fear.

But my amazement did but increase when I heard this shadow give utterance aloud to feelings which I expressed to myself in a whisper. In words whose exact form I am unable to set down, but which admirably conveyed my thoughts, the dark form declared that it was impossible for a mind endowed with any sensibility to pass this beautiful domain without stopping long enough at least to regret that all that life of elegance and enjoyment for which it had been built, seemed to have departed from it forever.

Whereupon somewhat taken aback I made answer, lying to myself,—for I say again that my prevision was the same as the shadow's—that there was no reason why this house which was closed for the time being, should not be re-opened some day and be filled once more with joyous life and activity. But the shadow sighed once more, shook its head, uttered the one word “Never!” which sent a shudder

through me, and gliding behind the wall vanished from sight.

I left the place more cast down than when I arrived. My curious meeting with a stranger who seemed to be stirred by an emotion singularly akin to my own, unnerved me to a degree which at first I failed to realize; but as I was descending the hill which led me back to the Tongues valley, I thought I recognized in front of me the dark form of the man whose voice I had heard near me, and I started to run in order to overtake him.

I came up with him outside an inn from whose partly-opened door a faint glimmer of light could be seen. It was sufficient, however, to enable me to perceive some of his features, for he turned round as I drew near. Apart from a certain handsomeness, I was at once struck with his eyes, or rather their brightness. They seemed to burn in the darkness.

Only the eyes of certain albinos, or the eyes of cats who are able to distinguish things in the dark, unseen by human eyes, have produced a similar effect on me. The man

emerged from the light and I saw his burning eyes as he stood in the road.

I would have liked to speak to him but my courage failed me.

I remained standing there as though dazed while he walked away. The fresh breeze from the sea fortunately swept my brow. Some one spoke to me. It was the innkeeper. I made my way into the inn and asked him if he knew the man who had just passed his door. He told me that he was a celebrated English painter, and people in the country round said of him that he was "a bit touched."

## CHAPTER IV

### THE WEDDING

**W**HEN I returned to Vascoeuil a letter lay waiting for me. It bore the Paris postmark, and the address was written in a handwriting unknown to me. On opening it I found a line from my uncle who had written a hurried scrawl from the Tyrol.

The Tyrol! People do not go to the Tyrol for business purposes.

What was his object in wandering about the Tyrol with Cordélia while I was kept waiting for them in this wretched house? He did not attempt to explain. He gave me an address to which I was to write to him.

“Write as often as you can; write every day. In the meantime I will suggest something which will occupy your time until we return. I want you to redecorate Vascoeuil with ‘every modern comfort.’ I leave the matter entirely to you. Furnish it to your own taste. It belongs to you and Cordélia. I

intend to give it to you as a wedding present. You will be married at Vascoeuil. I am well aware that the property has never greatly appealed to you. Have it renovated in such a way that you will like it. But don't have any alterations made in the grounds. That will be Cordélia's affair. She has ideas on the subject. We both send you our love."

Not a word came from Cordélia. Why did she not write to me? Did she no longer love me? Ever since my return from Hennequeville I asked myself the terrible question.

I wrote to my uncle and gave full expression to my misgivings.

I told him that it was impossible for me to apply myself to any task whatsoever unless I knew how I stood with regard to Cordélia, and she alone would be able to restore my peace of mind.

A fortnight elapsed without any reply. I spent those two weeks like an idiot waiting for the postman. Surdon and his wife took pity on me and endeavored to "argue" with me, but I refused to listen to them. At last I received a letter. Again it bore the Paris postmark. How I leaped upon it!

A letter from Cordélia! That is to say a line or two:

"Of course I still love you my dear Hector. I have never ceased to love you. What an idea! And what nonsense! We shall meet soon, my husband to be!"

Well, it was a letter which by no means satisfied me. "I still love you my dear Hector," seemed to me a sort of plaster to cure my pain. It was not what I wanted; and even "We shall meet soon, my husband to be" was cold comfort to me.

I wrote to Cordélia and poured out all my woes. I wept like a child over the letter as I reminded her of our vows, and I assured her that I would rather die in despair than lead to the altar a Cordélia who no longer loved me as of yore.

Then, oh then, a few days later, I received eight pages from Cordélia—eight long pages which made me weep for joy. I recognized in them my little playmate of the long ago, her vivacity, her impulsiveness, her delight in being with me, her adorable love of mischief.

She seemed to have plunged anew into the past with an abandon which she wished me to share. She would have no difficulty in that!

And then suddenly after indulging in these memories she spoke of the present with an assurance which at once restored my mental and physical health. She was looking forward to the simple duties of marriage. She spoke of our taking up our abode at Vascoeul and entered into particulars which caused me straightway to fall in love with the place. She went on:

“You will see how delightful Vascoeul will look when, between us, we have had it refurbished to our tastes. You must take a trip to Paris and buy various things,”—here was a list of suggested purchases.—“I want you to have everything ready by the time we return, because father wishes us to be married at once. I shan’t be the one to stand in the way! Oh, while I think of it: Don’t have anything done to the grounds. You have never understood them. They have a beauty all their own, which I am longing to develop to the utmost. I shall transform them into a

garden fit for Pelléas and Melisande. We will take our walks in them in days of depression, for however happy one may be, life has its days of depression which, however, are not without a charm of their own. In the meantime, how delightful it would be to go for our honeymoon on horseback as though we were both crazy. You will remember that when we were quite young we used to dream of making such a trip, and we laughed at those respectable people who went off by the ordinary train. But you will see that we shall take the train like everybody else. What does it matter so long as there is a gondola at the end of the journey? We will go to Venice. That was always understood. The Tyrol is horrible. Nothing but mountains. And I loathe mountains, particularly when they keep me apart from you!"

The eight pages continued in this strain. Dear, dear, dear Cordélia! How could I ever have doubted you and your dear little heart, your dear little heart! . . . Quick, to work! Come on bricklayers and painters and



"the whole blooming lot of you" as my uncle would say.

I stirred the men on to greater exertions by my good spirits and generosity. I myself looked like a bricklayer's laborer, and Surdon gave way to silent laughter when he handed me a jug of cider which I emptied at a gulp in order to show the others that I could do full justice to the amber liquor.

I did well to hurry on with the work. My uncle and Cordélia arrived home a week earlier than they had foretold. I expected them about the eighth of October, whereas they reached Vascoeuil on the last day of September. The work was not nearly finished.

Cordélia found me on the top of a ladder busily engaged in papering her boudoir. I fell into her arms. She bore the shock quite well, exclaiming: "Heavens, how ugly!" I made a gesture which caused her to burst out laughing. I thought that she was speaking of me while she was referring to the wallpaper. That was enough to throw us into a state of merriment which brought my uncle on the scene.

He gave us his blessing and kissed us; kissed us and gave us his blessing a second time; and recounted that he himself was married in that house, that Cordélia was born in it, that our children and our grand-children would be born in it. Whereupon Cordélia, who turned a deaf ear to him, exclaimed:

“My goodness, how nice the paint smells here. I say, look here, father, I don’t want to be anything but a house-painter now. How does that strike you?”

“I approve my dear. Oh, I quite approve. That’s a very healthy idea!”

I was rather surprised to hear him speak like that. I was always under the impression that the health of a house-painter was subject to considerable risk, owing, I think, to the white lead in his materials, and I raised the objection to my uncle, whose only answer was to give me a friendly pat on the back.

A few minutes later he said with his usual kindly smile:

“You are still the best of all Hectors. I hope you’ll never be any different.”

I don’t know why he should have given ut-

terance to such a sentiment, because I have no intention of being any different. Nevertheless on thinking it over, I have since concluded that he found a simplicity in me which appealed to him, the unemotional and well-balanced temperament of a man who is not in the habit of creating difficulties where there are none, and he counselled me to remain as I was if I wished to insure our happiness.

The three following weeks passed so quickly and pleasantly that they stand out in my memory as among the happiest weeks of my life. I dismissed from my mind every pre-occupation having no connection with the diversions of the day, and these consisted, for Cordélia and me, of upsetting the entire household, hiding behind doors, chasing one another like school children and kissing until Cordélia, all flushed, gently pushed me away exclaiming: "Hector that will do . . . leave some for to-morrow!"

Dear, dear, dear Cordélia!

When she first came home I thought that she was looking rather pale, overcome doubtless by the fatigues of the journey. Now she

had regained her beautiful color. She was still as slender as before, but I discerned that none of the natural beauties of a woman were lacking in her. I hardly know how to express my meaning, but to my mind women were never more beautiful than they are nowadays; and I still adhere to my opinion. Mentally and physically she was perfect. I cannot say more.

At last the great day arrived. It was a wonderful function and one that will long be remembered and talked about at Vascoeul. Cordélia's father, who was a great landed proprietor, had issued invitations to the entire district after the fashion of his own day. I mean that representatives of the families round about, the possessors of great names and great fortunes, were present and entertained with princely magnificence.

My uncle would have liked the festivities to be kept up for three days, but he yielded to Cordélia's entreaties, for she declared that if the guests remained after six o'clock we should take our departure. The wedding breakfast,

in accordance with Cordélia's wishes, was called lunch. And it was indeed a lunch!

But all this was nothing in comparison with the feast which was given about a mile away at the farm of my uncle's principal tenant. Tents had been erected in a large field, and the country people who were assembled therein let themselves go for all they were worth, like the guests at the gargantuan wedding feast of Gamache.

Cordélia gracefully went the round of the tables without evincing the least repugnance for all this excessive gorging and I was very glad. I accompanied her like a little dog.

"They're not at all stuck up. We hope they'll be happy," we heard our guests exclaim on every hand.

## CHAPTER V

### AN UNEXPECTED PRESENT

**O**N returning to the house we found our guests in the drawing-room gazing enraptured at the wedding presents which were on view. Heaven knows that they were numerous enough!

It was at this juncture that Surdon came in carrying, with some difficulty, a large flat package wrapped in canvas upon which a small square piece of cardboard was pinned bearing in writing the words:

*"My offering for the wedding"*

The card was not signed.

Several guests had read the inscription, and were amused over the wedding "offering." Our attention was attracted by their laughter, and when my uncle, Cordélia and myself drew near, they were already speaking of a wedding

surprise, and eagerly expressing a wish to see the present.

My uncle read the card, turned pale, lifted his eyes and looked at Cordélia, who also read it. A deep blush suffused her cheeks. But she displayed no confusion, and smiling said:

"It's from him. He often uses one word instead of another. Sometimes he does it on purpose as it amuses him. Besides, it's his writing."

To me the incident was a complete riddle. My uncle's pallor, Cordélia's blushes, the words that passed between them—these things began to trouble me.

"We might as well see what it is," I said, pointing to the package.

"What's the use?" returned my uncle. "We'll have a look at it later on."

Cordélia left us and went to an adjoining drawing-room.

Then I was seized with a feeling of curiosity and opened the package myself. When the canvas which covered it was removed, I could not repress a cry of admiration, and the guests around me were breathless with wonder.

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It was a portrait—a portrait of Cordélia.  
And such a portrait!

It was a picture of a marvelous radiance. It seemed to have been painted with the softest of lights. It was utterly impossible to conceive by what magic of coloring a human being who had nothing at his command save brushes and the pigments in metal tubes, was able to transmit to canvas so ideal a visual image.

I had never before encountered anything which could lead me to suspect the existence of such an art. I had had an opportunity, like all those who assist at great public functions in Paris, and delight in such things, of visiting one or two exhibitions of paintings which affected to be original, and professed to revolutionize art. Those works expressed either an exaggerated symbolism or flights of the wildest fantasy—were a great hoax in fact. I say freely what I think and if any one takes offense the more's the pity. As a general rule these paintings are enshrouded in an erudite obscurity from which shines a vague and eccentric glimmer of light.



But the miracle of this portrait consisted in this: It was the picture itself which was painted in such a way that rays seemed to radiate from it of themselves, without the intervention of any sort of trick.

The artist had succeeded in showing to the ordinary eye what it does not usually perceive, that is to say, the invisible light which the body radiates around itself . . .

I can speak of these things now that I have acquired the most painful and terrible experience in this domain, but at that time I was conscious of it all without comprehending it, and it would have been difficult for me to express clearly my thoughts in a language of which I was ignorant.

In short, in this effulgent portrait it was as though Cordélia's soul came to greet you from the first with a divine smile which emanated from the entire expression of her face.

And now I understood what she meant when she wrote: "A portrait should represent something more than the mere lineaments of a person; it should convey the expression of the soul."

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She was obviously acquainted therefore with painting like that which that day had enraptured us, and also doubtless with the painter himself, who had sent this "offering" for the wedding.

It was no longer possible for me to doubt it!

I bent over the canvas to discover if the portrait was signed. I deciphered the one letter "P."

My uncle and Cordélia were not present to satisfy my curiosity. I went to look for them but could not find them. I was told that Cordélia had retired to her room in order to have a short rest.

Our guests were beginning to take their leave. My uncle rejoined me. The pallor which had made such an impression on me was gone. On the other hand he was in high good humor and very talkative as he wished good-by to his guests. He glanced at me from time to time and smiled broadly as how should say: "Be happy. All goes well."

What was the cause of his sudden perturbation during that memorable day?

Yielding to a latent impulse which had been

growing in me since the scene over the portrait, I returned to the drawing-room where the wedding presents were on show. The portrait was gone.

I asked old Surdon what had become of the masterpiece. He made answer that by "Mademoiselle's" orders—he could not get accustomed to call her "Madame"—he had himself taken it down into the cellar.

When I expressed my astonishment, he assured me that it was the very place for the devil's own painting.

I stopped him as he was making off and said:

"Do you know the man who painted the portrait?"

"You have other things to do, monsieur, to-day, than to bother about such nonsense," he returned, giving me a look and frowning.

He wanted to slip away, but I held him back.

"Look here, Surdon, I am going to ask you one question, but you will have to answer me if we are to remain good friends. When I went to Hennequeville I saw a man outside

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the garden gate looking up at the empty house. I was told that this man was an English painter whom people in the district regarded as slightly 'touched.' Is this the man who sent the portrait to your mistress to-day?"

But Surdon stubbornly turned away, answering me in words which exasperated me:

"I have already told you, monsieur, that the whole thing is nonsense."

I was raging within myself and did not know what to say.

Surdon was right, however. That was a day on which nothing but my happiness ought to have occupied my mind, and here was I questioning a servant in secret upon incidents which, obviously, were not now serious, and from which, to all appearance, it was desired to spare me out of good feeling.

I retired in a more or less ill temper to a secluded part of the park, which I never cared for because of my thinking it was a dreary place. I was surprised to find myself harboring thoughts which were unworthy of

Cordélia and me. But, as has been said, man is a foolish animal.

Just then my uncle came up to me. He was in traveling clothes. He had in fact decided to leave that same evening for Caen. He at once said that he had something to tell me in confidence; something, however, of no great importance to which he would certainly not have alluded but for Surdon, who had acquainted him of my curiosity with regard to the portrait of Cordélia.

## CHAPTER VI

### PATRICK

**I** FELT somewhat disconcerted, but as occasionally happens in moments of trepidation, I managed to overcome the difficulty by a bold stroke.

"I say, Uncle, you must excuse me," I began, "but accident led me across the path of a man who was gazing gloomily at the house at Hennequeville, and I was told he was a painter. I thought, perhaps, that there was some connection between this painter and the portrait which came to-day, and also certain incidents which caused me, before our marriage, a great deal of pain."

"What do you mean?"

"Your hurried departure to . . ."

"Well, that's true, and it was about this that I wanted to speak to you, so that the subject should never again be mentioned between us. You must know that Cordélia came back to the house one evening with a stranger whom she

had discovered in a farmyard painting some wench feeding her fowls. She declared that he was a wonderful artist and she was very grateful to him for agreeing to accept her as a pupil.

“The stranger used to laugh at her youthful enthusiasm and he conducted himself like a gentleman. He was an Englishman of good family, slightly eccentric, possessing views on most things which were peculiar to himself. I did not always follow what he meant, but his ideas cast a spell over Cordélia for the time being. I saw no reason why they should not work together either in the house or the country round. Patrick, for such is his christian name, and the only one by which he signs his paintings, lived in a cottage on the borders of Tongues forest.

“I was at that time greatly taken up with business which compelled me to go frequently to Paris, and I failed to perceive the changes which were taking place in Cordélia.

“It was Surdon and his wife who called my attention to the fact that she had lost her vivacity, no longer played at farming, or

mounted her horse, but spent her whole time in painting or reading or dreaming, leaving the house only when the stranger made an appointment to go sketching in some part of the country, and returning thoughtful and silent.

"I then took stock of Cordélia and was amazed to discover a new look on her face. She was now as grave as she used to be gay, and wore a curious absorbed expression as though lost in a reverie. I bitterly reproached myself for my carelessness and oversight. However, I said nothing, the better to keep a watch over her. I soon saw for myself that Cordélia was living only through the medium of this man Patrick's thought."

"Oh, good Heavens! that's just what I feared," I gasped.

"Don't worry yourself," went on my uncle, "for as you will see, the whole business is of no consequence. Do you know the sort of man Cordélia had to do with?"

"A rogue," I returned.

"That's just it. A sort of mountebank who tried to persuade her that the moon was made of green cheese, and told her a pack of



silly tales about his psychic powers and such-like nonsense, which ended by turning her head."

"But did she still love me?" I inquired.

"I believe she still loved you, only she didn't want to be married!"

"Oh, good Heavens!" I exclaimed.

"I will tell you what happened, and you will see that the whole thing is of no consequence."

"Forgive me, Uncle, but I can plainly see that what you tell me is of the utmost consequence. I never dreamt that it was going to be of so much consequence!"

"Look here, my boy, you make me ill. Are you a man or not? Aren't you married to a girl whom you adore and who loves you now that her eyes have been opened? If to-morrow morning there is any question of this imposter of a Patrick may the devil take me! I'll never shake you by the hand again. So listen to me, for we must have done with this business . . . I discovered in a desk in the studio a regular correspondence carried on between Cordélia and Patrick in secret."

“Well, that’s about the limit!”

“This correspondence,” continued my uncle, “is what these people call a correspondence between souls. And I can assure you, my dear Hector, it is not this psychic communion, to use their own words, that will make me a grandfather one of these days! . . . Almost at the same time I found in Cordélia’s room, in addition to this rubbish, a new book-case crammed with works on magic. Yes, a library of occult science. An incredible number of ‘books on the unseen world, on faces and souls. Can’t you picture a book on ‘faces and souls’? Oh and an illustrated work on stigmatism, mediums, thaumaturgy and what not . . .

“To prove to you, my dear fellow, that the whole business is of no consequence, I must tell you that I had no need even to see Patrick to get rid of him. Everything came out in the most natural way from Cordélia, who was always a sensible girl, and herself realized the danger which she was incurring by listening to this charlatan. When she discovered me in the thick of all these books and Patrick’s let-

ters before me, she threw her arms round my neck and cried: 'Save me, Papa!'

"Dear, dear, dear Cordélia!" I could not help interjecting. "That's like her old self. I recognize her there!"

"'Yes, I'll save you from that madman, my Cordélia,' I replied. 'Hector will soon be home from America, and you shall be married.' And it was then, my dear Hector, that she said: 'But I can't marry Hector. Patrick has forbidden me.'"

"Ah, yes!" I said, gasping anew. "Ah yes! . . . This is too thick . . . Really this Patrick having the cheek to forbid her to marry me!"

"Yes, she declared that she was morally bound to obey Patrick, as her mind belonged to him."

"Her mind belonged to him! Why hang it all, this beats everything. And what reply did you make, pray?"

"I said to her: 'Pack up your things, my dear, and we'll make a trip to some part of Europe where there will be no danger of meeting this delightful gentleman, and above

all, let's have no more letter writing. We'll talk about all this again in a couple of months' time' . . . Well, we left here as you know and there was no need to wait a couple of months. At the end of six weeks this Patrick was forgotten, and Cordélia thought only of you. And now, my dear boy, say good-by. Cordélia is yours, and I hope that you won't have any difficulty in keeping her. Bless my soul, do your best to make her happy!"

Having said which, he clasped me in his arms almost stifling me, and left me, muttering between his teeth:

"Stuff and nonsense. Stuff and nonsense."

When I got back to the house Mathilde, old Surdon's wife, told me that her mistress was expecting me in her room. I entered, and my eyes fell on a dainty little champagne supper which lay ready for us, and it was none too soon, for Cordélia and I had eaten nothing or scarcely anything during the day, our attention being fully occupied in greeting our guests and returning their civilities.

The table was set in the boudoir, and the door leading to Cordélia's room was closed. I stood

there like a great stupid. I dared not knock at the door, and I began to cough as I stared fatuously at the walls which I myself had papered.

At that moment the door was softly opened and I heard Cordélia say once more in her laughing voice: "Gracious, how ugly! Gracious, how ugly!"

I looked round and joined in the laugh, for this time I knew that she was not alluding to me.

I was surprised to see her muffled up in a fur cloak.

"Hallo, have you caught cold?" I exclaimed.

"I haven't caught cold," she made answer. "I am cold. Don't you find it bitterly cold?"

I thought she was jesting, for as a matter of fact, the day had been unusually warm for the time of the year, and a pleasant wood fire was blazing in the boudoir which I could very well have dispensed with.

"You know that those sables suit you to perfection, and it's a little affectation on your part. Not that I have the faintest objection, but you'll be suffocated in them."

She replied with a shiver and summoned Mathilde to put more wood on the fire.

My heart sank within me, for I imagined that she must be really out of sorts.

"I tell you there's nothing the matter with me," she said, taking things very simply, "I feel cold. It might happen to any one to feel cold. I won't have you worrying yourself about me. I can't pretend to be warm when I'm cold. What a tyrant you are! . . . I say, we're beginning our married life well," she went on in the funniest manner, as she kissed me before Mathilde, who did not seem to mind, accustomed as she was for so many years to see us kiss each other.

It was Cordélia who told Mathilde to leave the room. Then she at once asked:

"What has father been talking to you about? You and he have been wandering about the park, which you dislike, for more than half-an-hour. What did he tell you?"

"He told me a lot of things of no consequence," I returned. "Let's have something to eat. Aren't you hungry?"

"Oh yes. But you know you may as well

tell me what he said. It was I who sent him out to you. I wanted you to know all, dearest, before you came upstairs to me here. Believe me the whole thing is utter nonsense. Tell me that you forgive me."

"Do I forgive you! . . . Dear, dear, dear Cordélia!"

As she carved the truffled galantine, she went on:

"When I think of it now I see how silly I was, but he was such an odd person. Indeed he really seems to have fascinated me."

"Don't let us speak of it," I entreated. "Don't let us speak of it."

"You ought to be glad to hear me speak so calmly of it. It shows that I am entirely cured. And I can assure you that I am quite as pleased as you are. One must not touch such things as occultism, hypnotism, and magic you know. One gets carried away and ceases to be master of oneself. It is a morbid condition to be in . . . What do you think of this galantine? Come, pour me out some champagne . . . And kiss me . . . What are you thinking about? Surely you're

not going to trouble about Patrick now. There! To mention his name makes me feel quite queer."

A shiver passed through her.

"I'm certain, Hector, there's a draught coming from somewhere."

"No, dearest, all the doors are closed."

"An ice-cold draught."

Her teeth chattered. I rose from the table filled with an indescribable uneasiness. And suddenly, as I looked at her, I saw her turn pale.

"What is it? What's the matter Cordélia dearest?"

"I see now what's the matter," she returned, drawing her cloak more closely round her. "It's the portrait."

"The portrait! What do you mean?"

"The portrait which Patrick sent to me and I ordered to be taken down into the cellar."

"Well?"

"Well, the portrait is cold."

Cordélia's words were Greek to me and the



look of blank amazement in my eyes bore witness, not only to my inability to comprehend her, but also to my uneasiness.

"You don't understand. You don't understand," declared Cordélia in a quavering voice. "That is what they call the externalization of sensibility. They assert that men of science have made conclusive experiments in this respect. For instance, the celebrated M. de Rochas has demonstrated scientifically that one can take a person's sensibility from him and transport it to a glass of water and make that person suffer by plunging a pin into the glass of water."

I sprang from my chair utterly dismayed by the tone in which Cordélia uttered what I regarded as "devil's tales."

"Are you going crazy, Cordélia? Surely you don't believe in such preposterous stuff. Come . . . Come . . . Do say something."

"I feel cold," she replied, in an increasingly quavering and far-away voice. "I feel cold. I am as cold as my portrait. I see

that I shall be ill if the portrait is left in the cellar. Besides it was wrong of me to send it down there. *He* must be displeased."

I realized with a feeling of intense sorrow that my Cordélia was not so completely cured of her strange malady as she imagined, and with tears in my eyes I exclaimed:

"Where would you like me to put it? I don't want to go against your wishes in such a trifling matter."

"Wherever you please, wherever you please, but don't leave it in the cellar. And be careful not to knock it about."

"Of course not. I'll go and fetch it," I said, greatly perturbed.

"You must forgive me, dearest, but it's not my fault, is it? I'm very sorry he sent it to us."

"So am I."

I went downstairs. I was fuming. I called Surdon and gave him instructions to fetch the portrait and then I told him not to bother about it, for after what Cordélia had said, I feared lest he should subject it to rough usage.

I myself descended into the cellar. I seized the wretched canvas and carried it to the drawing-room on the first floor, taking care in spite of myself not to knock it against the furniture or walls. Some people may say—some people are so clever!—that I behaved like a great simpleton, an ass. May be. But we shall see about that. We shall see about that.

The fact is that Cordélia held such sway over my mind that I could not choose but accede to her wishes.

Nevertheless after I deposited the portrait against the foot of a round table I flung wide open the French windows of the balcony which was not calculated to make it warm. The cool freshness of the night after a beautiful day, floated into the room. No blame could attach to me. I had treated the portrait with care and it was not now in the cellar. That was all that was asked of me, and if Cordélia was no longer feeling cold I should at once be able to cure her of her strange obsession.

When I returned to her she was still shiv-

ering in her cloak, and she gave me a mournful look.

"Why did you put the portrait in a draught?" she asked. "I was certain that you would play some trick. It's too bad of you. I am still cold. Bring it here, and then I shall be quite easy in my mind."

"Certainly, that's the best thing to be done," I exclaimed, and I went off again, bitterly regretting my mistaken calculation. I should have done better to put the thing near the fire; and then, if Cordélia had taken it into her head that I had left it in the cold, out of spite, she would have been confounded once for all.

When the portrait was brought into the boudoir, Cordélia, of course, declared that she was no longer cold. She removed her fur cloak, and I perceived that she was clad in a charming loosely-fitting robe. Oh what a delightful, sweet little thing she was!

"My dearest, you can't think how beautiful you are," I cried. "That's the honest truth, and no mere idle fancy, and when I kiss you I don't feel as if I am kissing a portrait!"

"I agree with you," she said laughing merrily. "You are taking my breath away."

Truth to tell I held her somewhat tightly in my arms, for I was quivering with happiness. She had become entirely normal again, so much so that she recalled me to the realities of our supper. And we started afresh to eat with good appetite and a light heart. We drank out of the same glass like children. Nevertheless, warned by my experience with the portrait, I was careful to keep the conversation from straying to the past. Our plans for the future and our impending travel about the world engrossed our attention.

"How happy we shall be!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, my dear Cordélia, we shall be very happy. We must think of nothing else."

I had uttered a word too many.

"What do you expect me to think about, my dear Hector?" she returned, as she regarded my air of embarrassment. "Oh, of course, you say that because of the portrait. I admit that I was greatly impressed by it, or rather by its being sent here, because I have never seen it, and I don't want to see it,"—I had

placed it in a corner with its face to the wall—"but the whole thing is over now—quite. Oh quite, I assure you. And when I think of it, now that I am all right again, I feel a little foolish of course."

Nothing could have given me greater pleasure than these last words. I did not lose the opportunity to score.

"You admit, dear, that just now you were not very well. The exertions of the day, and the necessity to recover your strength—you were simply hungry—these things were the cause of the trouble and brought about that fit of shivering, you may be sure."

"Yes, I am inclined to think so."

I kissed her again for these last words, but I thought it as well to add with the greatest good humor.

"Personally, I have no fear of the 'externalization of sensibility.'"

I had no sooner made the remark than Cor-délia's face grew serious once more.

"We make a mistake, I think, to treat these matters lightly. I may have given way to fancies, but I repeat that the 'externalization

of sensibility' has been scientifically proved. It is our modern material conception of things which has imprisoned the soul within the body, but in the Middle Ages . . . ."

Oh come, I say, I thought to myself. We are flying off at a tangent again. We are in the Middle Ages now!

"In the Middle Ages the soul was easily liberated from the body."

"We are not in the Middle Ages now, my dearest."

"How wonderful were its wanderings outside its prison!"

"Yes, yes, of course . . . . I say do try some of this fruit."

"Have you ever heard of persons being bewitched?"

"Never, and I don't want to know anything about them."

"What a great big silly you are, Hector! It is impossible to talk seriously with you. There are certain things you must know, unless you want to remain a blockhead."

"Thank you."

"The casting of spells is bound up in the

history of France, and modern discoveries have proved to us that these things are not pure imagination. When a person wanted to cast a spell on any one, he made a small wax image which resembled as nearly as possible the person whom he wished to be rid of."

"Indeed, and what then?" I inquired, slyly putting my arm round her waist.

"And then after, of course, externalizing the sensibility of this person to the wax image, he stuck a pin into the image and the person died."

"Are you certain that the person died?"

"Am I certain! No, I am not certain about it."

"I'm glad of that," I returned as I gazed into my Cordélia's face with the tenderest expression.

"But there are persons who are certain of it; persons who even maintain that many mysterious deaths in the Middle Ages can be accounted for only on this assumption."

I dared not ask who those persons were. I was greatly perturbed that the conversation



should once more stray to a subject which was distasteful to me. Suddenly she stood up.

"Show me the portrait," she requested, "I want to have a look at it."

Not five minutes before she had assured me that she had no wish to see it!

"Is it really necessary, my dear Cordélia?" I asked, not afraid to show a distrust which I hoped she might share.

But unfortunately her thoughts were once more entirely centered on the portrait, and it was with a regret which I shall feel all my life that I saw her bend over the canvas and turn its face towards us.

Though it remained in the shadow, the outline of the figure stood out clearly in its peculiar radiance.

"Oh how beautiful it is!" whispered Cordélia.

She stood for a few minutes still and silent, and then asked my opinion:

"Don't you think it is beautiful, Hector?"

"Very beautiful," I answered. "Very beautiful."

To be sure I had no wish to contradict her,

and moreover I had expressed my real opinion. Truth to tell, I did not know how to keep my countenance. When a woman dabbles in high art the simplest gesture by a man may appear to her a piece of stupidity . . . Still I ventured to press her hand softly to remind her of my presence. She turned her head towards me, and with a delightful and gentle look in her eyes, pointing to the canvas, said:

"You can say what you like about the man who painted that portrait, my dear Hector, you can say that he is cracked, and, in fact, I quite think that he is a bit crazy, but you must admit that he is a great artist."

And as I made the mistake of not replying at once, she went on:

"Oh, can't you speak . . . Besides he is the first artist to paint the 'aura.'"

"Just so."

"What do you mean, 'Just so'? Do you know what the 'aura' is?"

"No."

"Then why did you say 'Just so'? I will tell you what the 'aura' is: it is the cloud of

light which emanates from each individual and is discernible by the trained consciousness."

"Indeed! So the consciousness must be trained?"

Cordélia released herself from my arm which was round her waist, and gave me a stern look:

"Don't, my dear Hector, adopt an attitude of making game of what you don't understand. You would do better to think of all the matter round us which radiates light. Why should not the human body shed a radiance? It is not only a trained consciousness which can perceive these light-rays, but they are visible to the open eyes of certain persons, I can tell you. Look at this portrait! Besides, the negative of a photograph can develop these light-rays for us even far from the body whence they emanate, and sometimes they retain their actual shape. That is the aura."

"Really the negative of a photograph?"

"You are the only person to be ignorant of it."

"I am very sorry."

"This fluid substance," she went on with in-

tense seriousness, represents our perceptions and something more than our perceptions, our intellectual life, which emanates from us and precedes us and is conscious of things long before our body is. It is this force which, when I am in the street, makes me think of a person whom I shall meet in another five minutes, because my aura is conscious of him before he is discernible by my physical vision. Do you follow me? Do you understand me?"

"Yes," I acquiesced, absolutely terrified by the turn which the conversation had taken, "I am beginning to understand."

"Well, it is none too soon! If you only knew how interesting in reality the whole thing is. It is indeed the new thought—the only one that will matter in a few years' time. And this aura—your perceptions and my perceptions—is a force which can operate from a distance; and be made to operate from a distance; that is a well-known phenomenon. In this particular aspect it is called suggestion; and suggestion is a reality which is as indisputable as a mathematical formula—as two and two make four, for instance. By means of

suggestion, auras have been seen at an incredible distance from the body, if not separated from it altogether, for that would involve death at least . . . almost to forget the body."

And after uttering these last words in tones of rapt excitement which utterly overwhelmed me, she became once more plunged in thought.

What was she thinking about? What was she thinking about?

I sank into a chair and as I gazed at her a sense of hopelessness came over me. I saw her in profile as she stood erect facing the infernal picture. The light wrap which covered her shoulders had slipped off, and I beheld her bare young throat, the adorable outline of her arm as it hung with infinite grace by her side. My feeling of dejection gradually gave way to an admiration which longed to find expression.

I drew myself up cautiously and stole towards her like a thief; and I closed my arms round her to seize her as though I already feared lest my dear beauteous treasure should be torn away from me.

Taken aback, a slight cry escaped her and

she turned round with a peculiar look in her eyes which I had never beheld in them before, and stared at me as if she no longer knew me.

"Cordélia, I am your husband and I adore you," I whispered.

And I pressed my lips to hers, but the terror of it! I met lips which were as cold as stone, and I had no sooner placed a kiss upon them than she became a statue in my arms. I was holding to my heart an inanimate form; a form not devoid of life, but from which life had taken wing elsewhere.

Cordélia had fallen on my shoulders in a cataleptic-like sleep. I called to her. I used the most endearing words. I implored her to speak to me. She did not hear me. So far from returning my kisses she was unconscious of them.

"Cordélia! Dear, dear, dear Cordélia!" I cried. "Where are you? Where are you?"

At last, after laying her on the sofa in her deadly immobility, I began to shout and summon assistance like a madman.

## CHAPTER VII

### AFTER THE WEDDING

**M**ATHILDE and Surdon came hurrying into the room and were not less terrified than I was to discover Cordélia in this statue-like condition. The only thing which we could be certain about was that she was not dead. I cannot remember all that we attempted, Mathilde and I, to "bring her back to her senses," while Surdon went to fetch the nearest doctor.

We carried Cordélia in her state of insensibility on to the balcony. We brought her back again. We tried the effects of cold and heat in turn. We placed hot bricks to her feet and cold compresses to her forehead. What alarmed us more than anything else was the complete rigidity in which she lay in our arms, and nothing that we could do succeeded in relaxing the tension.

I employed a phrase just now with the full

meaning of which I was unacquainted. I said that Cordélia fell on my shoulder in a cataleptic-like sleep. That was true, but I more or less learned for the first time the meaning of catalepsy from the village doctor whom Surdon brought back.

And even then I failed to grasp the significance of what he was saying except that Cordélia was suffering from a nervous malady which had reached the critical point, and must have been brought about by great mental and physical strain and the unwonted excitement of a wedding day. He did not tell us anything new from this point of view, for it was in this sense that we regarded her illness. To what other cause could we, in our ignorance, attribute it save to excitement and fatigue?

Unfortunately this blockhead of a doctor proved his inability to awaken Cordélia. After blowing on her eyes without effect he seemed greatly perplexed. He knew more about it than we did, perhaps, but he was as powerless as we were. To our stormings and complaints he could but reply: "She will wake up of her



own accord just as she fell asleep." And he counseled me to have patience.

Have patience! . . . He was the limit! . . . I asked him in a voice strained with anxiety, how long this torpor could last. His only answer was to shake his head. He exasperated me.

"But, look here, will it last one hour—two hours?"

"One can never tell . . . One can never tell."

"Still it can't go on for a couple of days, I suppose?" I cried, incensed.

"Well, there have been such cases, but generally speaking. . . ."

I could have struck him. And yet he was a worthy man who strove to comfort me, to persuade me that the case was not very serious, to lead me to hope that we were confronted with a phenomenon which, if due precautions were taken, might not recur, and, moreover, would yield to treatment. And at the finish he recommended me to consult a specialist in nervous diseases. Having said so much, he gave me the slip.

I at once sent Surdon in the car to Rouen, whence he was to bring back Dr. Thurel, celebrated in the district for certain unusual cures which bordered on the miraculous.

I turned Mathilde out of the room, for since the doctor's remedies and her own nostrums were of no avail, she imagined that we were the victims of the devil, and she wearied me with her lamentations and exorcisms. I had the utmost difficulty in preventing her from going for the priest. What a honeymoon!

Left alone before the sofa on which Cordélia's statue-like form lay, I felt less affected by the pitiable spectacle of my beloved than by a sort of almost childish frenzy against the fate which had played this trick upon me. Heaven knows I deserved to be pitied! To have waited so long for this day and to pass it with a woman who had been turned to stone! By what fatality had Cordélia fallen asleep at the very moment when she was in my arms? It was indeed, to use my uncle's words, "utterly silly."

In my intense selfishness, knowing now that Cordélia's life was in no danger, I mourned

rather for myself than for her. I was, so I thought, the victim . . . Thus many men when they are balked of something on which they have set their hearts, or when the object of their desire escapes them, act like brutes. I am ashamed when I think of myself cursing Heaven in this room in which Cordélia and I were "at last alone." I am bound to say, however, in my own favor, that by degrees this blind resentment which arose in me against things in general, gave way to a feeling of great compassion and sorrow for the beloved being who still slept.

As the hours slipped away I was oppressed by an ever-increasing anguish. Now I kept watch over Cordélia as though she were dead, and I bowed in wonder before this great mystery, which was not less terrifying than the mystery of death itself. Poor, poor, poor Cordélia!

## CHAPTER VIII

### DR. THUREL

**T**HE day was beginning to dawn when Surdon returned with Dr. Thurel.

He had to seek the famous doctor at an official function. Not that he had, however, to drag him away by main force. The story which he told, straightway induced the doctor to leave, and he did not even take the trouble to return to his house and change his clothes.

I shall always remember his arrival in the wan light of day with his white shirt-front, his long, pallid face, his colorless eyes whose expression of deep thought it was impossible to forget when once you had encountered it.

From that day the image of Dr. Thurel has lingered in my memory. He brought with him so much that was new to me as I stood struggling on the threshold of this mysterious drama, and shed so much light on it. True, I was not at first dazzled, but I was at once "stirred" by the depths of my ignorance.

While the facts themselves had merely aroused my wrath without making any impression on my mind, he was able in a few words to reveal a new world to me. He was a man who was constantly saying the most astounding things and yet they were always impregnated with good sense. One felt compelled to understand the meaning and to believe in him unless one wished to be taken for a fool.

He gazed at Cordélia for some time, used the stethoscope, drew himself up and said:

"This is not exactly a case of catalepsy. It is what is called hypnotic sleep with muscular rigidity. Have no fear. We shall get the better of it."

Thereupon he bent over her, blew on her eyes and made some curious gestures, but obtained no greater success than his country colleague. Nevertheless after each futile experiment he seemed quite satisfied.

"That must be it. That must be it. Of course," he muttered.

Strange to say, whatever he did, and even the fact that his efforts were of no avail inspired me with perfect confidence. I felt

sure that, thanks to him, we should soon be out of our misery.

He requested me to step into the boudoir and questioned me at great length. He told me that, on the way, he had drawn out the servant, and the man had acquainted him of his mistress's peculiar mental condition a few months before our marriage. He begged me to confide everything to him without reserve, and regard him not only as a doctor, but as a father confessor.

Then I recounted the story of the English painter and the portrait and the various incidents relating to it, and how Cordélia had complained of being "as cold as the portrait."

He asked to be allowed to see the canvas, and after examining it, observed:

"All the trouble comes from this picture. There is no doubt about that. Your wife, monsieur, is under the influence of this man Patrick, but we will rid her of it, you may be certain."

"But she hasn't seen the man Patrick for several months."

"Very likely, but then there is the portrait.

Patrick can do a great deal through the instrumentality of this portrait. He has renewed the link with her through it."

After that he told me facts about the externalization of sensibility compared with which Cordélia's remarks were so much child's play, and told them so simply and accompanied them by such logical explanations that they no longer astounded me.

There could be no doubt that Dr. Thurel possessed the gift of persuasion.

"So my wife's sensibility was really in the portrait?" I said.

"Yes, to some extent. The body may be in one place and its sensibility in another. A clairvoyant's body, for instance, does not move, but his individual vision is at the spot which he is describing. In like manner your wife's sensibility was transmitted to the portrait by means of thought."

"By means of thought?"

"Her thought yielded to that of another person. But her sensibility was there, for thought holding absolute command over sensibility is able to produce on it the desired

effect . . . Dr. Charcot, the master of us all, made an experiment in this regard by applying a sheet of paper to the epidermis of a patient whom he had hypnotized, and indicated by suggestion that he had employed a blistering plaster. At once the usual effects of a blistering plaster were apparent, such as the swelling of the skin and so forth. I am quoting this experiment because it is the most typical case, and you will see for yourself the conclusion that may be drawn from it."

Suddenly he stopped, looked steadily at the portrait which had been left in the boudoir. Like every one else, he was enraptured by it. He lifted it and blew upon it . . . He blew sharply upon the eyes.

Then he replaced it in its position and walked on tiptoe towards the next room, the door of which had been left ajar, making a sign to me to remain where I stood. He looked into the room. Almost at once he turned around with the light of victory shining on his face.

He came back to me still walking on tiptoe.

"She's waking up," he said in an undertone.



"Don't say anything of all this to her. Pretend to think that she's been in a natural sleep. I can do nothing more here for some hours. I shall go and have a rest. Never mind about me. Look after her. I must tell you this: If you kiss her, kiss her as a brother."

"What do you mean—as a brother?"

"Well, be kind and gentle to her as a brother. I assure you . . ."

But I did not wait to hear more. Already I stood in the doorway. Cordélia's eyes were wide open and she seemed to be looking for me. And yet when her eyes alighted on me there was a look of astonishment in them as if she had not expected to see me there.

"Hullo, there you are," she breathed. "Where are we now?"

"Why, at home, my dear Cordélia."

I saw her cheeks flush, her eyes smile, her lips bloom again.

"Oh yes, of course," she returned. "Oh my dear Hector, what a lovely night! But why didn't you go to bed when you came in? You haven't caught cold? There was a cool

breeze by the riverside. What a couple of sillies we are? Who would have thought of a honeymoon in the moonlight? Well, what did I tell you about my park? Can you imagine a more beautiful bridal chamber?"

I listened to her incomprehensible chatter with a feeling of consternation. Her first words: "What a lovely night!" struck a pang at my heart. It was indeed a lovely night! And what did she mean by her "beautiful bridal chamber?" And why, as she spoke, did she look round as if she beheld our room for the first time? From what sort of dream had she awakened? I had no opportunity to put these questions to her. Her head drooped again on the pillow, her eyes closed, and this time she fell into a calm, natural sleep. A soft regular breathing escaped from her lips, and she wore a smile which ought to have delighted, but which perturbed me. For, after all, what was she smiling at? I was afraid in my dazed condition to ask myself *whom* was she smiling at. She had awakened out of her first torpor but to fall into another, without giving me time to kiss her even as a

brother. What was this walk along the river-side? What was this bridal chamber of which I knew nothing? I was once more alone, alone with her, and I could not restrain my tears, while she continued to smile in her sleep. It was more than I could bear.

And so the hours went by. 'At last it was morning.

I set my forehead against the window-pane and watched as in a sort of dream the life of the country outside awakening around me. For that matter the entire episode seemed to me a dream, an optical illusion.

Was the night through which I had just passed, this incredible wedding night, a reality? Had I indeed emerged from it and were my eyes now looking out upon everyday things? Were not those carts which rolled along the roads, phantom carts? I was in the last stage of exhaustion, and yet I was conscious that it would be impossible for me to seek forgetfulness in the sleep which was essential to my physical and mental health. My suffering mind was never more restless.

And my thoughts were revolving, endlessly

revolving, round the extraordinary language uttered by Cordélia in the interval between the two sleeps. "Why didn't you go to bed when you came in?" Well, I said to myself with a feeling of dull resentment against my wavering and insensate imagination, well, what is there in all this to cause so much painful excitement. Cordélia dreamt that she was wandering with you in the park during the night. Why make such a fuss about it?

Of course, of course. I wished Dr. Thurel was awake. I longed to talk to him. I longed to talk to him.

He had been given a room in the left wing of the château. From where I stood I could perceive the windows with their closed wooden shutters. Truth to tell, I stared at nothing else.

Cordélia on the bed behind me was sleeping her peaceful sleep and still smiling. I turned away from her. No, and again no! I failed to understand how she could smile, even in her sleep, when I was so much to be pitied.

And then I saw the shutters in the doctor's room being opened. I slipped out of the

room. I crossed the courtyard. I knocked at his door.

"It's I, Doctor."

"Well?" he questioned as I entered.

"Well, she is still asleep. She is sleeping in the most peaceful manner as if nothing had happened."

"That was to be expected, and all is for the best."

"She said a few things before she fell asleep."

"What did she say? Tell me what she said."

I repeated her words, and observing that the doctor was in deep thought, added:

"Apparently she was recalling a dream that she had when she was in her trance."

"A dream! You think it was a dream? It may have been. But . . ."

"But what?"

"Why, there's another theory which the undoubted fact that your wife was under the influence of suggestion renders quite plausible."

"What theory?"

"Well, we are plainly confronted with the phenomenon which we call the externalization . . ."

"I know, I know . . . The externalization of sensibility."

"One moment. The phenomenon of the externalization of sensibility finds its counterpart here in another phenomenon: the externalization of motive power."

"What then?"

"Why then her active individuality, her vital force, her aura, as the magicians call it, might really have left her last night, and taken that walk, and it would have been no dream."

"It's amazing."

"Not at all."

"Still, if she actually left us, how do you account for her talk about having a walk with me? I personally did not leave here either in body or mind."

"I have already explained," returned the doctor, "that we are not dealing in this case"—these were his own words "in this case" spoken with the composure of an expert which did but increase my agitation—"we are

not dealing with a cataleptic condition, properly so called, for, in that event, she would not have remembered what she had been doing, but of a rigid hypnotic condition from which the subject sometimes awakes with vague recollections . . . Here obviously there were vague recollections."

"You mean," I exclaimed, "that she thinks she remembers going out with me, but that, in reality, to use your own language, she went for a walk with another person. It's ridiculous . . . utterly ridiculous."

"Or she went alone . . . Calm yourself."

It was all very well for him to say, "Calm yourself." I refused to be pacified.

"All this, Doctor, seems to me appalling. You don't mean to say that a person can do such things while the body is asleep, and not dream of them?"

"My dear fellow, have you still to learn that an ignorant person in a condition of somnambulism can become a scholar, can spend his nights furnishing his polygon with multifarious learning, and even acquire foreign

languages? That is what can be done while one is asleep."

"What do you mean by his polygon?"

"We will deal with that another time, young man. It would lead us too far from the subject we are discussing."

"Meanwhile there is one thing that I do understand," I returned. "My wife is suffering from some terrible mental disorder."

"But, my dear fellow, there is no reason to lose hope," returned the doctor in a confident voice. "An illness of the mind can be cured by the mind. Have confidence in my treatment, and take me to your wife."

Cordélia had just risen. I found her clad in a kimono, her hair falling loosely over her shoulders, standing in front of the glass making faces. As soon as she saw me she threw herself into my arms and cried in a mocking voice:

"Oh, my poor husband!"

Then all of a sudden she asked:

"Who is in the next room?"

No movement of any kind could be heard. Dr. Thurel had seated himself in the boudoir



without a sound, and I had closed the door behind me. I was so greatly surprised that I made no answer.

"Is it one of your friends?" she asked. "Why don't you introduce him to me?"

She forgot the place and her incomplete toilette—everything. She made for the door with a firm tread, opened it softly, caught sight of the strange-looking old gentleman in evening dress, seemed in no way disconcerted, smiled, and went up to him with outstretched hand.

"This is Dr. Thurel," I said. "He is, in fact, a friend—one of my best and most reliable friends."

"Indeed, I have often heard of you," she returned. "Oh, doctor, how pleased I am to meet you."

She sat down beside him. He still held her hand. And now he kept his eyes fixed on hers, and her gaze seemed riveted on him.

"Leave us," he whispered peremptorily, "I want to talk to her."

I left them together, and I descended into

the garden, impelled by an irritability which made my teeth chatter.

. . . . .

Ten minutes elapsed, which seemed so long drawn out that I could have shouted aloud. At length Dr. Thurel appeared. He was beaming.

"Cheer up," said the old gentleman, "I think I have rid her mind of any thought of the other person. All the same he had exerted a magical power of attraction over her. Good-by, my dear fellow."

"If that is so," I cried excitedly, "how shall I ever be able to express my gratitude to you?"

"Stuff! Look here, give me the portrait. I will place it in my private collection."

I gave him the portrait and, Heaven only knows, with a glad heart!

## CHAPTER IX

### I DISCOVER A CHANGE IN CORDÉLIA

**I** MUST admit that, at first, I thought I should have but to rejoice, for as the worthy doctor had led me to anticipate, Cordélia displayed, after his departure, a perfectly free and normal mind.

It was as though nothing out of the way had happened. When she came downstairs clad in a gossamer robe, and clung to my arm with a grace and trustfulness which enchanted me, old Surdon and Mathilde complimented her on her appearance, and conveyed to me by certain signs that all was as well as well could be.

Surdon wanted to saddle Thunder and Monarch, or to get out the gig so that we might go for a long drive before lunch, but Cordélia would not hear of it. She expressed a wish to stroll through the fields, to wander on my arm along the country lanes.

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"We don't want to ride or drive to-day," she said, leading me away and gently pressing my hand. "We don't need anything or anybody. Let us think only of ourselves. I have so many things to say to you now that I am your wife."

These last words were spoken in a serious and intense voice which I failed to recognize; and I could not help giving a start when I looked at her.

As she uttered them, she lifted her eyes to me and they seemed to contain an expression which, like her voice, was new to me. I read in them, beyond the shadow of a doubt, an emotional tenderness and gratitude which startled me without my knowing exactly why. At all events, I could not at the moment analyze what was passing within me. But one thing was certain: I felt distinctly uneasy. I fully expected, indeed, to see a look in my dear Cordélia's eyes like that one day; to see this impulse, this quivering emotion of thankfulness towards the man who had become everything to her, but I did not expect to see that

look after the dreadful time through which we had just passed.

In a word, I was unspeakably surprised. Our walk, our conversation at lunch, the sweet surrender with which, leaning upon my shoulder, she confided to me her plans for the future—all this did nothing to remove from my mind the curious impression that I was confronted with a new Cordélia who was no longer the young girl of the day before. I turned pale at the thought of it.

She noticed it and in her turn betrayed a certain anxiety at my agitation.

"But dearest what is the matter? Are you not feeling well? You don't say anything."

I kissed her hair and whispered tritely:

"I love you."

My heart was pounding as though it would burst. She could hear it.

"I really believe that you do love me," she said, "and, besides, your heart tells me so. Listen to my heart which will tell you, too, how it loves you."

She took my head between her two little hands, and placed it on her young, heaving

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bosom with the quiet gesture of a woman who is giving herself up to the husband to whom she belongs.

I was speechless.

She went on as she stroked my hair:

"What a night! What a beautiful night! Oh how well you understand me! You are wonderful, my Hector."

I am unable to say whether I really seemed wonderful to her, but I drew myself up roughly. My face underwent a fierce contortion. She looked at me with disquiet.

"What is it? What's the matter?"

"Nothing . . . Nothing. It's over—a slight attack of neuralgia."

"Ah my love, you are tired. You had no sleep."

"Yes, you're right. I had no sleep."

"You ought to have gone to bed. I told you so when we came back from our walk in the park."

"Ah yes . . . Our walk in the park . . . Of course, of course."

"But what is the matter with you?"

"Nothing I tell you . . . A slight headache."

"Well, be sensible. You must go to bed, dearest."

I had to give way. She came with me to the door of my room. I let myself be led by her little hands. Strange to say I made no effort to keep her. She left the room, and I threw myself on the bed as an animal lies down. And soon, in order to cease thinking about things which seemed either appalling or ridiculous, I fell asleep.

The light was waning when I woke up feeling greatly refreshed. I have always been able to sleep soundly. A shower bath helped to restore my self-possession. My uncle had returned during my nap. He had come from Caen, and was leaving that same evening for Paris. I discovered from his first words that he knew nothing of the incidents of the previous night. Surdon and Mathilde, perceiving that "all was well as well could be," had not considered it necessary to enlighten him. I could not but approve of their discretion.

My uncle had been for a short walk with

Cordélia, and when she returned her face was beaming with happiness.

"Have you had a good sleep, dearest?" she asked as she threw herself into my arms. "Has that awful headache gone?"

I kissed her ardently in return.

My uncle wore a smile as he contemplated the pleasant spectacle. He endeavored to take me aside to express his gratification.

"Well, what did I say? There you are, the happiest of men and she is the happiest of women. She told me so. I congratulate you—you rascal!"

I could have struck him. I could have struck him. He gave me no opportunity. He embraced us and went off muttering repeatedly:

"What a handsome couple they make!"



## CHAPTER X

### THE SECOND NIGHT

**I** HAVE taken particular care to trace in detail the various stages of this extraordinary story in order that the reader who would fain judge us, notwithstanding the jury's verdict, may know as much about the facts as I do, and be in a position to fix the responsibility definitely as between me and the man who was the greatest thief that ever lived. If the reader will follow me step by step he will understand me, and it will be open to any candid person of average intelligence to measure the extent of the calamity which befell me.

I now come to the second night, which will throw a light upon the events which occurred at Vascoeul and those which were to follow; a light which others may regard as supernatural, but which I am compelled, unfortunately, to proclaim as entirely natural after what I know and saw with my own eyes.

At least that is what I maintain to-day, but considering that I was sailing on an unknown sea, it will be realized how far I had to go before I recognized the truth.

Cordélia wished to wind up the day, as on the previous evening, by a little homely supper in her boudoir, and, to be sure, I should have been the last person to think of raising any objection. Anything that could bring me closer to her gave me the constantly renewed hope that I might succeed in driving away, once for all, the delusions which kept us apart. I use the word delusions advisedly, because that is how I regarded the matter on that second evening when I sat down beside her at dinner.

And how could it have been otherwise? How could I fail to cling to this word when I take into consideration the abyss over which my poor distracted mind hung suspended for a moment in the course of this startling day. Just think. Remember the altogether unforeseen attitude of a Cordélia filled with gratitude and affection. Delusions! Delusions! I appealed to you, O delusions, in defense of

her, and, as the lesser of my enemies, to her unhealthy imagination, at once ardent and poetic—for the whole thing was but the aberration of a highly sensitive mind. I tried to convince myself of it.

And thus I no longer wished to remember anything but Dr. Thurel's reassuring words: "I have rid her mind of any thought of the other person. She is cured."

Upon my word, when I think of her as I beheld her on that second evening seated at our little domestic fête, helping me as though I were a spoiled child, anticipating my every wish, stirring the fire lest I should catch cold, assuming the superior and tyrannical graces of a nurse which caused us to burst out laughing, I cannot but cry: "There she was as God made her, and as He gave her to me—my dear, dear, dear Cordélia!"

Before she met the thief, she was sweet and fresh and girlish and perfectly natural, slightly inclined to be mischievous and self-willed, but born to make a husband happy who would have made her happy. And, take it from me, it is not necessary to be clever or

brilliant to make a woman happy. It is a question of being an ordinarily decent man; at least I still think so, and I have yet to meet the person who can prove the contrary. I know what I mean. One must also be in love with her. Who ever loved her more than I did? And did she love any one more than she loved me? Did she love the thief? Lord above, let those persons who know everything tell me if the dove which is transfixed in its flight loves the hawk whom it encounters on its way from the nest . . .

But let us return to our little supper.

I forget on what subject Cordélia was good-humoredly making fun of me. I have always possessed an equable temper. I can allow myself to be teased without taking offense, just as a pet dog will permit his ears to be pulled by those to whom he is attached. Thus Cordélia could throw herself into the game to her heart's content.

But suddenly I sprang to my feet with a look of ferocity on my face, a very excellent look of ferocity, and walked up to her, grinding my teeth, as if I had sworn to gobble her

up alive. She started to run round the table, laughing boisterously. I for my part, while I continued to give chase, strove to keep my countenance and to assume a more ferocious air than ever. At length she pretended to be frightened as I was pretending to be in a rage; and when I mention that in our race round the room the light wrap which she wore rose higher, caught on to a piece of furniture and even became torn, revealing a glimpse of some new loveliness, it will be gathered that the game had become an extremely attractive one; so much so that I thought the best thing I could do was to finish it by capturing the fugitive and holding her in my arms.

She had taken refuge in a recess of the window, and it was there that I dived after her. I caught her, but straightway I was impressed by the fact that she had stopped laughing. I lowered my eyes to her face, but it was no longer the face of a young girl. She gazed at me with a look of grave distress yet, I must say, full of love. I felt her young heart beat against mine. I held her closer, calling her the most endearing names.

"Oh dearest," she breathed. "Have you seen the park? Look at the park. How beautiful it is!"

She was not now looking at me. Her eyes were turned to the park which gleamed ghost-like in the moonlight. The night was a dream of brightness and opalescent light. The tall trees whose leaves had already fallen, stood erect like huge silver chandeliers, their wondrous shadows lengthened, as though by the brush of an artist, on the luminous grassy slopes and gravel paths. In the distance the unseen mystery of the park into which I had never set foot, stirred under the motionless, effulgent, impassive moon.

I tried to turn Cordélia's eyes away from the ill-omened sight, and bring her back to our own interests. She thrust me aside with her little hands and returned to the window, pressing her forehead against the pane. I may be asked: "Why did you not compel her to leave the window and the perilous spectacle of the park in the moonlight?" Let those who are unable to understand that more power sometimes lies in a young girl's little finger

than in an elephant's foot, cease to read me!

This is the answer that I have to make:

Men of science, or those who call themselves men of science, have not yet, perhaps, given a name to this "psychic" force, but if they were to take the trouble to study and weigh its power mathematically, and dignify it with a Latin or Greek name, there would be less astonishment, perhaps, that the aura of a marriageable girl yielded to the suggestion of a sham-necromancer than to realize that a mass of flesh and blood weighing about thirteen stone, for that is approximately my figure, could offer no more resistance to the little hand of the maid in question than could the sigh of a new-born babe. Indeed, here we have in all its wonder the phenomenon of levitation. And from what I saw, it is the mind only that has any weight!

. . . . .

I was perhaps lacking in mind that evening. It does not become any one to reproach me. In life one must do the best one can. And I was powerless against Cordélia's determination to remain at the window. It was then

that she visibly lived over again her experiences of the night before, and as I listened to her, I began to suffer infinite pain. It will at once be seen why—at least I hope so.

Her hand had furtively sought mine and she drew me beside her in the shining moonlight. Her head was resting on my shoulder and, seen from below, we must have borne some resemblance to those saints linked together on stained-glass windows which adorn and illumine the chancel of a church. I set down this thought because it occurred to me at the time, which shows that in my mind's eye I realized that we were somewhat absurd, but, through that very fact, it indicates also that I was absolutely bereft of any power of resistance.

Poor dear Cordélia was able to do anything, anything she pleased with me!

"Shall we take a stroll in the park as we did yesterday, dearest?"

"Come, Cordélia, I say . . ."

"Let's take this path,"—we did not stir from the window—"Let's go along by the poplars."

Here she uttered some curious sentences



about the song of the poplars when the wind whispers among the branches.

"Let's go by the river side,"—more strange sentences in the form of stanzas about the floating heart of the water lily and the tiny cradles of the fairies sailing over the stream. "This is the path which will lead us to the marriage-chamber."

"What marriage-chamber?" I could not help asking.

"You know as well as I do, dearest. The chamber which has been prepared for us, all in gold."

And thereupon she gave me a description of the marriage-chamber all in gold. I cannot recount the exact words which Cordélia used in speaking of this chamber. From that moment onward, indeed, her language seemed to lose sight of earth and even mundane things, to become a kind of music befitting the understanding of angels or poets who are never unduly troubled to discover the significance of unconventional words. However that might be with the fanciful melody which flowed from my beloved's lips, my natural common sense

restored the dream-palace in which, in Cordélia's imagination, I had been wandering for sometime to its proper proportions. I gathered that this chamber all in gold, was neither more nor less than a small glade in the wood, shaped like an arbor, sheltered by lovely trees on whose branches some foliage still lingered while beneath them, on the earth, lay a rich, dense carpet of leaves, yellowed by autumn.

The beginning of my cruel experience on this occasion was that these flights of fancy, which accompanied our promenade in the golden chamber, were intoned in English. Cordélia and I knew English perfectly, but we did not speak it when we were together. My pained surprise reached its culminating point when Cordélia, with the utmost seriousness, asked me to recite as, it would appear, I had recited in the golden chamber the night before, a few lines from "Lara" and "The Corsair." I must have opened my eyes in dumb amazement, for Cordélia became more and more importunate:

"Come, come, dearest, don't wait to be pressed. Don't waste time. It's so fine, so

pathetic, so splendid. And then you can wind up with Childe Harold's farewell. You know the lines:

Adieu, adieu! my native shore

Fades o'er the waters blue:

. . . . .

Come hither, hither, my little page:

. . . . .

My Native Land—Good Night!

"And while you are reciting I will place my head on your shoulder, as I did yesterday, so as to hear your delightful voice."

While she was speaking she laid her head on my shoulder, but I raised it in my trembling hands and forced her to look into my eyes which doubtless were disturbing to see, for she suddenly grew restless.

"What's the matter with you?"

"A very simple matter, Cordélia. I have never known by heart a line of Byron or any other poet, and I have never read 'Lara,' 'The Corsair,' or 'Childe Harold.'"

"What do you say?"

"I say that it was not I who was with you in the golden chamber."

"Be quiet, you poor dear, be quiet."

"I say that it was not on my shoulder that you laid your head."

I came to a stop. Her appearance filled me with dismay. Her eyes were staring at me with a strange light as if she saw me for the first time.

She gasped a dull moan of despair, and a cry escaped her lips like the cry of a soul at the point of death striving to cleave to earth:

"Save me, Hector, save me!"

She uttered that cry and uttered it to me proving that she belonged to me, to me alone, and had never belonged to any one but me. The thief might say what he liked, he was but a thief. It was all very well to assume an arrogant attitude at the Assize Court; and the world was able to grasp his meaning when he said that her heart belonged to him. He had burgled it. The shame of it!

I replied to Cordélia's poignant cry of "Save me, Hector, save me!" with a transport of supreme delight. Yes, my love would indubitably rescue her from those frightful delusions. It would be no difficult task for

my arms to wrench her this time from the accursed window. She weighed but a feather in my grasp. Her head, with its hair in disarray, lay adorably on my shoulder. The look of mingled fear and love depicted on her face immensely stimulated my strength. I really believed that I was at length able to dominate this frail and quivering anguish, and I pressed my lips to hers.

And straightway it seemed as if I had killed her, and was kissing a dead woman . . . I held in my arms, as on the night before, a marble statue.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE GOLDEN CHAMBER

**I** DID not now summon any assistance. I was seized with a cold grim fury of despair which called for no witnesses. I carried Cordélia into the next room and laid her on the bed, and gazed at her in impotent rage.

I called to mind every word that Dr. Thurel had said in describing the condition of bodily immobility in which I now beheld her, and I had not a doubt from what I heard from Cordélia's own lips that her mind, which a little before had given animation to that now lifeless form, had left it for some other place.

What other place? Was it hard to guess? Was she not at the very moment when she escaped from me making at full flight for the bridal-chamber of which I knew nothing?—the bridal-chamber to which, it seemed, an influence that was independent of her will and mine lured her with a force which I had vainly striven to shatter with a kiss?

Or rather did it not seem that I had but to press Cordélia's lips with my own to cause a repetition of the catastrophe of the night before?

I remembered then, in the growing irritation of my mind, Dr. Thurel's amazing words: "If you kiss her, kiss her as a brother." What did that mean? I shook with horror and the most terrible resentment. Was I to understand that every time my lips united with Cordélia's I should stand in fear of this awful phenomenon and that she would never be anything to me but a wife of stone?

At the thought that so infernal a suggestion was within the bounds of possibility, a tremendous wrath made the blood surge in my veins, and I felt capable of murdering the man who was responsible—the villain who was making me suffer agonies to say nothing of the hideous ridicule which would attach to so grotesque a marital position as mine. I was perfectly aware of that fact also, and I did not fail to derive from it a capacity for revenge which in the end swept me off my feet.

In any case I could not consent to remain

any longer an impassive and inactive spectator of a scene which offered me but the image of an inert body; and I made my way in haste towards the spot where I knew that Cordélia's mind was wandering in thought with the mind of another person.

A few minutes later in the dead silence, under the hostile moon which looked down, perhaps, upon things invisible to my own eyes, I passed along the line of tall trees which screened the edge of the park into which I had never entered.

As soon as I had traversed this screen I found myself in a wood so densely entangled that I was at a loss at first which way to go; and I began to think of Cordélia's words when she described it; a forest full of snares for those who did not know it and hospitable only to lovers of woods and solitude.

I was certainly no lover of these woods, and in spite of all my efforts, I did not succeed in ploughing my way through it, and I made scarcely any progress. The branches laid hold of me on every side and held me back with their thousand small arms, or transfixed me, by



stealth, with their thorns. The bridal-chamber which lay within its recesses was well guarded!

Hardly knowing what she did, however, Cordélia had sufficiently enlightened me. Nevertheless I knew that before she betook herself, in mind, to the place, she must have visited it more than once in body, or else, as I imagined like a simpleton, she would not have described it to me so fully. That was another opinion which I have since been constrained to abandon.

And yet how did she get through? I suddenly remembered that the bridal-chamber stood beside the river. Cordélia's actual words were:

"In the bridal-chamber there is the great mirror of the river set in a frame of gold and the rays of the moon make the surface of the water like a silver sheet. You see yourself in it from head to foot. Owing to this you are never alone. When you think that you are one, you are two, and when you think that you are two, you are four. You have to keep your eyes open!"

"If I follow the river's bank," I said to myself, "I shall be certain to reach the bridal-chamber," and I made for this bank through the avenue of poplars.

At first I congratulated myself on my idea, and my path for some way was properly marked out. My pace, however, began to slacken when I left the poplars behind me; and soon I had considerable obstacles to surmount in order to follow the stream. Every trace of a path had disappeared, and I was forced to hold on to the willows to prevent myself from falling into the water.

The Andelle, at Vascoeuil, is not a very imposing river. It cannot be used for towing, and its banks are visited only by an occasional angler who wishes to savor the delights of solitude among the reeds.

Such as it was, it flowed that night with so much quiet grace between its pleasant banks, reflecting so coquettishly its clumps of reeds and rushes, like little silvery chignons, in the midst of this wild nature where all was beauty and delight—the moon smiled strangely at me from the river—that despite the mortal horror

which stirred me, I was impressed by its charm, and I interrupted my course, for a moment, to exclaim from my heart "I understand you O Cordélia!"

What was it that I understood? In truth, was I about to become affected by it? Was this park, under the moon, so amazing a sight that my mind would remain for ever impressed, preferring this wild retreat for my honeymoon, to the luxurious modern nest which I had built at so great a cost?

Still, let us pull ourselves together.

Besides, where was the bridal-chamber? Suddenly I caught sight of it in the distance, or rather I half-saw it. It was the sort of rotunda which, in the light of day or the twilight, would resemble a red-gold arbor fashioned by the miracle of autumn on the bank of the murmuring stream.

With infinite caution I drew nearer. I stole through the grass and sprigs like a Red Indian on the war path. I no longer felt the sting of thorns. I held my breath.

And all this—all this—in order to take by

surprise, two minds which had made an appointment to meet in a clearing!

I cannot say if the reader realizes the enormity of my proceedings. For my part, I performed these actions in a manner at once entirely unconscious and yet entirely natural. It must be understood from this that I did not apply my reason, but yielded to a spontaneous impulse which flung me in the wake of Cordélia's runaway mind; and while I experienced the influence of Dr. Thurel's fantastic though scientific explanations, I acted altogether like an ordinary, deceived husband, bent on avoiding the least imprudence which might warn the culprits and prevent me from obtaining the proof of my misfortune.

In what shape would the proof become manifest? I certainly could not tell, nor did I even ask myself the question, but I so little doubted that I was about to learn the truth through one of those psychic phenomena with which Dr. Thurel had crammed my brain, that when at last I stealthily made my way on all fours into the bridal-chamber, I was completely bewildered to behold merely an empty

space; that is to say an atmosphere as pure and clear as crystal, pierced by the brilliant rays of the moon which had transformed the chamber all in gold into a chamber all in silver!

It was none the less beautiful, but truth to tell, the scene and the charm of this sylvan bower were just then the least of my pre-occupations. An empty space and silence! I rose from my stooping posture and stood awhile breathing hard before this void.

An empty space and silence! And perhaps *they* were there. But I was unable, with the eyes of the flesh, to see them!

I looked about me in sheer amazement. I walked round creeping between the shadow of the trees like a shadow myself searching for two shadows!

Suddenly I burst out laughing. I felt that I was committing a monstrous piece of folly.

But then, if I was acting with such sheer lunacy, why did my laughter break in the middle? Why did it come to a stop all of a sudden in my parched throat, when a gleam of light and a slight shade quivered above an old moss-covered stone bench within the arbor?

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Why did I go towards the bench, leaning forward with clenched fists? What did I intend to do with my big fists, the fists of a heavy-weight boxer? Challenge the light? Knock out a moonbeam? Oh the irony of it all! Why do some people see while others are blind? I felt that if I could see I should be less afraid, for now I was afraid . . . Well I was afraid of what I was about to see, for though I could not yet see, I could hear!

## CHAPTER XII

### THE THIEF

**I** HEARD a kind of whisper, a kind of soft whisper. It was still some distance away, but it indubitably came from a human being who was drawing nearer, but drawing nearer without making any other sound; and it was this which filled me with affright.

I expected to hear the twigs and dead leaves crack under the feet of the persons who were coming, but there was nothing, no sound in the dead silence of the night but this human murmur which seemed to be wafted on the air not far from me, and was approaching closer and closer.

I gave no further thought to the stone bench which I had left. The voice, soft and clear, was growing more and more distinct, so distinct that I seemed to hear a few words which sent a shiver through me from head to foot, and made me draw back and conceal myself in the wood.

I withdrew in haste, in great haste, for the voice was drawing still nearer. It now seemed borne along by the water, and I turned my head towards the river. A word, a terrible word—I could distinguish only this one word—reached my ear from the river. It was the one English word *love*.

I was standing at no great distance from the bank of the river. Suddenly I saw the reeds bend and the hearts of innumerable water-lilies on the silver surface of the water give way to a small skiff which glided to the bank facing the bridal-chamber.

A man was seated in this light skiff and I at once recognized him by the curious beating of my heart and his strange sad-looking eyes, eyes like those of a cat, which seemed to light up his pale face. I recognized him, too, from other details. He was clad in the same loose clothes, the same sports jacket open at the neck worn by him on the evening when I encountered him for the first time. And, he was bare-headed, as on that evening, and his hair was well brushed back, disclosing the high



white forehead which he had pressed against the garden gate.

My first impulse was to make a rush at him. I had every reason to settle my account with him once for all. His presence in my park, on my property, fully entitled me to take the law into my own hands. It was the finishing touch to his audacity and his felonious love-making. It explained quite clearly why my poor dear Cordélia was the victim of these perverse and uncanny influences. Dr. Thurel's intervention had been fruitless, because the instigator of the mischief was near at hand, prowling round us, prowling round *her*. During the last two days the scoundrel must have remained hidden in this obscure retreat, or have left it only to approach Cordélia like a thief; to ensnare, surprise and recapture her by fixing a gaze upon her which would enable him to overcome her mind, and carry her away with him to his lair.

Alas! Why did I not that very night make an end of the man who had burgled Cordélia's heart? For he was there right enough in flesh and blood; and Heaven knows that I could

have made good use of my fists despite his great eyes, like the eyes of a mournful cat.

Now this is what happened: He dropped his sculls and stood up in the skiff, and I was about to throw myself on him when I heard him utter this sentence in English: "My love I am yours with all my heart," and then leaning over the boat he went on: "There is nothing I would not do for you."

To whom was he speaking, since he was alone in the skiff?

"Come, come, now," I said to myself, "You know quite well to whom this man is speaking these soft words of love and their meaning is obvious. To whom is he saying 'My love'? No need to look far. She is seated beside him. He is leaning over her, whispering in her ear words that she comprehends as well as you do . . . *For she is there!* Cannot you see her? Cannot you see her? And yet you know that she is seated in the skiff."

Well, no, I was unable to see her. In truth I did my utmost to see her, for I was conscious that he saw her, but I did not possess his vision. Yet there was no doubt that she was

there . . . I had only to look at him. And to listen to him.

He affected an attitude as he drew himself up, and then with his airs and graces sat down beside her. To me he was grotesque, hideous. I sincerely pitied Cordélia for having to listen to such an unmitigated bore. At one moment he was spouting poetry to her. What a comedian!

Suddenly he sat down again, leaned on one side and threw out his arm as though to place it round her waist. It was more than I could bear. I resolved to put an end to this grim farce, when a new scene riveted me to the spot. *I could now see her!*

I must explain what I saw and endeavor to make myself understood. I am setting down the facts for public information and to relieve my mind, and also to lay bare the terrible truth. Thus I confine myself to what I saw, and I do not wish any person to go beyond my own interpretation of my testimony, nor do I wish any person to stop short of it.

I would urge the reader to be not less cour-

ageous than I was in venturing on this startling voyage into the abyss of psychical research in which the best hope for the future of mankind lies.

Let this terrifying love story serve at least one purpose. Let the world learn once for all how mortifying it is to remain a heavy-weight, hermetically closed in a mass of flesh, when faced by the mind which in its wanderings is unsubstantial and intangible or at least as elusive as a handful of water.

The man stood up in the skiff, his head still a little on one side and his arm round a waist which I was unable to see. For I saw him only in the skiff; saw him making the gesture of a ladies' man which had infuriated me. But though I saw but one person in the skiff, I could distinguish both of them in the mirror of the water.

In the slight swirl caused by the swing of the boat I discerned in the moonlight the reflection of the pair of them standing up.

Was it an optical illusion? Was it the result of defective vision? Were my senses playing me false? At the present time, after

having gathered together and placed in compact form my recollections, I am bound to say: No it was no optical illusion. I saw. I saw. I saw the reflection of the skiff in the water, and below it, also in the water, Patrick and Cordélia leaning against one another.

I am convinced of the fact, for though I turned my eyes, after seeing the double vision on the water, to the boat, to confirm the reality, and saw only Patrick alone with his arm thrust out and his head a little on one side, on the other hand, when I looked again at the water I beheld the double presentment once more.

I lay stress upon these details because they obviously represent a phenomenon which unites in a peculiarly interesting manner physical science with psychic science. I offer it as a subject for investigation to those men of science who are engaged in their laboratories in endeavoring to probe the secrets of every aspect of Force.

It would seem that my eyes passed through Cordélia's aura, as it stood in the atmosphere, without being in the least aware of it, while,

on the other hand, I could perceive the outlines—somewhat faint, I confess, but unmistakable for all that—by fixing my gaze on that part of the water which had taken the picture, just as photographic negatives were taken of pictures of Katie King during the time that one of the most renowned scientists of the last century was making his experiments in psychical phenomena—I mean Professor Sir William Crookes.

It will be readily understood that these interesting scientific considerations, which I set down here by the way, occurred to my mind subsequently, and that, at the time, I was much more absorbed in the phenomenon itself than in attempting to discover an explanation of it. I was unable, unfortunately, to suppress a cry of fury when I beheld in the mirror of the river the great thief press a kiss upon my beloved's forehead. The picture at once vanished, that is to say, nothing remained on the surface of the water but Patrick's reflection. Cordélia's silhouette had disappeared, while I heard the villain exclaim: "Remember! Remember!"

## CHAPTER XIII

HAPPINESS CONSISTS IN REALITIES NOT IN  
DREAMS

**W**HEN I reached the bank, Patrick and the skiff were hidden from view behind the reeds which had closed in upon him. A few hundred yards farther on the river made a bend and left the park. I had no hope of overtaking my man, and after shouting a few offensive remarks at him, to which he made no response, I returned to the château as quickly as I could.

I ran and woke up Surdon telling him that the Englishman was in the park and ordering him to get his gun out. He grasped the situation at once.

"Don't kill him if you can help it," I cried, "but send a few shots through him so as to make him feel sick of the place."

"You can rely on me," replied Surdon, adding: "That explains everything."

"Yes, Surdon, it explains everything."

After that I went up to Cordélia's room. She had just wakened. I was in no way surprised.

"Do you know where you've been?" I asked, but she could make no reply. On this occasion she remembered nothing; at all events she did not seem to remember anything.

I then described what I had just witnessed. Events were taking such a turn that we should have to face them together if we ever hoped to gain the mastery over them. And moreover I realized quite clearly that I should be powerless without Cordélia's assistance. She was either on my side or on *his*. If she was with me, she was bound to help me to wage war on him and I did not doubt her.

I was sure of her. My intervention on the bank was so involuntary that I had no time to perceive, from the mirror of the river, Cordélia's particular attitude towards him, but I was only too firmly convinced, since Dr. Thurel's visit, that she was under the spell of prolonged magnetization, in other words, her astral body was held captive, so that I could not find fault with her for not spurning the



arm which clasped her waist with too much affection, or for yielding to a kiss which she was unable to avert.

When she learned of the thief's audacity in setting foot into our property and of his being, doubtless, still in the neighborhood, she threw her arms round my neck and cried:

"Take me away. Take me a long, long way from here. He is capable of anything. He is capable of keeping me with him for good."

Dear, dear, dear Cordélia! I did not wait to be asked a second time, and a hand-bag was soon packed. Moreover I left word for Surdon to join us in Paris the following day with our luggage; and we went off in the small car, which I drove myself.

I soon congratulated myself on introducing my beloved to the distractions of Paris. She was so delighted that she forgot the strain of the terrible forty-eight hours through which we had passed. She entered into the spirit of everything. A walk in the Avenue des Acacias in the Bois de Boulogne helped her to forget the amazing promenade in the park in the moonlight; at least I preferred to think

so. We lunched at a smart restaurant in the country, and we emerged from it laughing at the least thing like children carried away by their first glass of wine.

Cordélia for the first time tried to smoke, and she discovered an Egyptian brand of cigarettes which she liked so well that she consumed a goodly number of them. The result was that when we returned to the Palace Hotel she had to lie down and take a short rest. I left her in the custody of Surdon. When I went out I could not repress an exclamation, for I recognized, standing at the hotel entrance, Dr. Thurel.

He was not less surprised than I was. He at once asked after Cordélia, and was so greatly interested in my story of what happened on the second night of my honeymoon, that he took me off with him to his flat. Here, he got me to repeat the facts in detail, taking notes the while, and then he said:

"The thing is quite logical. As long as your wife was under the direct influence of the man who was close by, anything that I was able to do to release her was bound, of course, to

be reduced to naught as soon as I left you. That is precisely what did happen, but it shows also that your wife is subject to this influence only when the hypnotizer is comparatively near. There are patients who are in worse case than she is," went on the doctor thoughtfully, "and you certainly must not lose hope. You did well to bring her away from Vascoeuil. You must travel about the world. The case will respond to treatment. Everything depends on you."

He repeated this last sentence with emphasis, and I could not help giving vent to my impatience and ill-humor.

"Everything depends on me!" I cried. "That is easy enough to say. But what influence, if you please, can I exert if every time my lips touch hers she falls into a trance? You must be fair and admit that I am at least as much to be pitied as she is."

"I have advised you to kiss her as a brother."

"Do you really believe that a brother's influence will be enough to rid her of that man?"

"No, I don't say that, but I believe that it is absolutely necessary, if you wish to risk a kiss, to remove your wife's recollection from that man's power of suggestion through time and space. Travel about, and have patience until you both feel yourselves the master of her 'O' and have nothing more to fear from her 'polygon.' "

I held my head in my hands. For the second time this geometrical term occurred when Dr. Thurel was speaking. What was this "polygon" and what did he mean by the "O" of which it was incumbent upon me to obtain the mastery?

The doctor vouchsafed the explanation that these were figures of psychical speech employed by Dr. Grasset in his work entitled "Spiritualism in relation to Science" in order to explain fully certain characteristics. I should like, in my turn, to enable the reader to understand them as the kindly old gentleman explained them to me. I should not attempt to do so if it were not that he had the goodness to lend me certain books to read; so that I might become acquainted with a science

which would prove useful to me in Cordélia's condition of mind—books which I strove to assimilate from love of her without her knowledge.

It would seem, then, that there is a superior psychicism, that is to say, there are psychic acts which are deliberate and carried out by the free will of a person, and preceded by thought which Dr. Grasset symbolizes by the letter O, and an inferior psychicism which is quasi-automatic and symbolized by the nervous centers which are connected together in the shape of a polygon.

This polygon must be regarded either in its physiological condition—absent-mindedness, sleep, dreams—or its extra-physical condition—artificially induced hypnotism—or its pathological condition—somnambulism, ambulatory automatism and so forth.

When the O is no longer concerned with the polygon, the latter does more or less what it pleases, and thus one can do with it almost what one wills. For this reason it suffices for the O to be absent-minded—for instance I am thinking of one thing while I continue with my

polygon to pour from a jug into a glass which is already full—and it suffices also for the mind of another to take possession for the time being of the O. In that case the polygon can be transmitted to a remote distance.

All this seemed to me as clear as noonday, so lucidly did the doctor explain it, and I exclaimed:

“You can rely on me, Doctor. I will keep a watch over Cordélia’s polygon! And it won’t be my fault if it slips away from me!”

“Meanwhile take the train,” returned the worthy doctor. “And be quick about it. You might possibly meet that man here as you met me. This Palace Hotel is not a place where one can prevent one’s self from being seen. And besides, no city in the world is so small as Paris!”

I hastened to the station and inquired about sleeping-cars, and that same evening we caught the train for Rome. We took Surdon with us.

When two days later we beheld the walls of Servius Tullius, Cordélia uttered shouts of joy. On alighting from the train she had a mind to make for the Forum, but by hurrying her a

little I soon managed—the thing was to acquire some influence over her—to make her forget for the time being all those old things, and give her a taste of more modern pleasures such as are found in the thorough comfort of the best hotel in Rome. We lunched in the Italian manner at the Castello di Constantino, where we were served on the terrace from which the eye took in a landscape of rare loveliness, though it was somewhat marred by the sight of ruins which are supposed to be impressive but which, for my part, I have always found tedious.

We had, however, to visit some of the ancient monuments. The Colosseum greatly attracted Cordélia, who told me mournful stories about the martyrdom of the early Christians. I hastened to take her away to less dismal scenes. A promenade at the fashionable hour in the gardens of Pincio, iced-drinks in a café in the Corso, and in the evening, after dinner, the tarantella danced by pretty girls in the grand hall of the hotel, threw us into the vortex of life in Rome.

Cordélia took an immense pleasure in these

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elegant displays of Italian manners. I was myself greatly stirred to see her eyes shining with happiness. She never seemed to me more beautiful. When we returned to our rooms I held her close and told her so, but I acted cautiously, and at the same time with a feeling of great anxiety. Had I become sufficient master of her O to be no longer in fear of the whims of her polygon? The thought that if I kissed her she might at once fall into a trance, in my arms, brought beads of perspiration trickling down my forehead.

"Good gracious, how hot you are, Hector!" she cried as with an adorable gesture she wiped my forehead with her handkerchief.

I no longer knew what I was doing. Her lips smiled at me. The fragrance that clung to her carried me away, and, in truth, I forgot all my good resolutions and kissed her passionately.

Marvel of marvels, she did not fall into a sleep!



## CHAPTER XIV

### HAPPY DAYS

**D**EAR, dear, dear Cordélia! What splendid weeks were ours and how completely we forgot the doleful Patrick! I am bound to say that I neglected nothing to bring about this result. I proceeded to overwhelm my Cordélia with every attention that a husband in love could offer to his young wife in order to divert her thoughts.

Entertainment followed entertainment, and I wanted my beloved to be the best-dressed and the most beautiful woman of them all. We made a few acquaintances. By the good offices of a Secretary to an Embassy who was a friend of mine, the most exclusive drawing-rooms were open to us, and Cordélia was the queen of them. She no longer worried me about visits to ancient ruins. I acted in such a way that her whole time was taken up by our life of amusement. The museums were

forgotten. I had very good reason to be suspicious of pictures!

When she was weary of Rome we set out for Naples where new joys awaited us. The wonderful bay with its most beautiful sea-shore was a witness to our love. We went to Capri Sorrento and Castellamare. The boatmen sang as they plied their oars. I burned those little works which are called "guides," for I had observed that when Cordélia was carrying them with her wherever she went, she spoke of nothing but the dead, which was anything but cheerful.

My holocaust spared us many a story about Tiberius, Claudius, Nero and the rest of them. That was something to the good. We could not, of course, escape Pompeii, which, however, is not a tiresome promenade. Always a great concourse of people is wandering about the ruins; tourists dressed in such a way that one feels inclined to laugh, and they alone are worth the trouble . . .

Dear, dear, dear Cordélia! She was all mine in those happy hours when we thought only of rejoicing at the beauty of the day, and

of our love, without concerning ourselves with what had existed before our time and would exist after we were gone. Was not that the essential condition of happiness? We must not let ourselves give way to too much thought. No, no, we must not let ourselves think too much.

Observe how happy we had both become since we began to think as little as possible. In point of fact, though we were always together, facing each other, we had no occasion to ask the question: "What are you thinking of?" It is during fits of abstraction, when the mind is preoccupied, that the "polygon" is up to its tricks. The best method of preventing one's thoughts from wandering is to refuse to think at all. I know what I am talking about.

But the mind must be occupied. After Naples we retraced our steps to Florence, and finally we reached Venice which I had reserved for the last. A disastrous town! But let us not anticipate events.

## CHAPTER XV

IN WHICH MY ANXIETY ABOUT CORDÉLIA'S  
POLYGON IS REVIVED

**S**URDON had engaged a suite of rooms for us at the Hotel Danieli on the Riva degli Schiavoni. It was in this hotel, it seems, that Alfred de Musset fell ill and learned the treachery of his lady love, George Sand. Cordélia heard the story of this lamentable event on the second day after our arrival, and it seemed unduly to depress her. I hated the bungler and his story and wanted to leave the hotel. But Cordélia had taken a fancy to it, and I had to give way to her.

One day I found her with a book in her hand. It was de Musset's correspondence with this George Sand. I read a few lines and threw the book out of the window, went over to my beloved and embraced her, and told her that it was a crime to spoil our perfect happiness by opening the door to dis-

agreeable thoughts about two persons who did not know how to love.

Was I not right?

"Oh, my dear, now you are preventing me from reading," she made answer. "Think, Hector, you have already refused to let me visit the museums."

"Heaven forbid, Cordélia, that I should refuse you anything whatever," I exclaimed. "I am your slave as you know. If you are really keen on seeing some pictures, we'll go this afternoon to your museum. Would you like me to countermand our trip to the Lido?"

"That would be too much," she returned, smiling. "We'll go to the Lido for dinner and supper. All the same I shall be glad if you will show a little more eagerness to see the 'wonders of art.' "

"Lord above, what string are you harping on now?" I exclaimed. "Did we not go, as was proper to the Doge's Palace and see the dungeon in which Marino Faliero was imprisoned?"

"Oh, Hector, it amused you to slip our cards into the secret letter-box which was used

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at one time for anonymous accusations to the Council of Ten. And you call that seeing the 'wonders of art!'"

"Yes, and I denounced the proprietor of our hotel, accusing him of trying to poison us! You had a good laugh at the time, you must admit."

She was not laughing now. What new shadow was passing over her brow? She seemed carried away by a depression of spirits which rendered her more beautiful still, but which filled me with alarm, because it was akin to sadness. And, indeed, her eyes were bedewed with tears. I threw myself at her feet.

"I have hurt your feelings," I exclaimed.

"No, let me cry," she returned in a broken and far away voice. "Tears that we owe to the emotion caused by beautiful things are sweet tears. I remember those happy moments when we left our gondola and entered the church of Santa Maria della Salute. Just think of the lagoon, the grand canal—all that marvel of walls and towers and opalescent water."

"A walk in the Salute!" I cried, making no effort to conceal my amazement. "We were never together in the Salute, dear."

"Oh you don't mean it," she protested. "We went through the church thoroughly."

Thereupon she took a great deal of trouble to describe it to me. And then suddenly, observing my bewilderment, she came to a stop, and declined to say another word about her visit to the Salute. She went as red as a cherry; and I left her in a state of profound uneasiness.

I felt the need of being alone to ponder over what had come to pass. While we were at Venice we had not parted from each other. I left her sometimes in her room, but I remained in the hotel. She could not, therefore, have visited the Salute.

I hurriedly made my way there, and I was dumbfounded to discover that her description of the church was accurate.

I was intensely alarmed, for I could no longer doubt that Cordélia's polygon was beginning to play its tricks again. While she was supposed to be asleep her polygon was

wandering about the Salute! I recalled to mind Dr. Thurel's words:

"Just as cases are quoted in which the subject discovers in a dream, memories placed therein without his cognizance by his polygon while awake—the O being then in a state of abstraction—so there are numerous instances in which the subject while awake discovers memories placed therein, without his cognizance, by the polygon which has been at work while he was asleep—the O being lulled to sleep or under the influence of suggestion."

When I landed from the gondola and found myself again on the Riva degli Schiavoni I could not help exclaiming:

"The misery of it! It's that confounded polygon again. Still we in Venice are a long way from Patrick."

I had no sooner uttered these words than a voice behind me exclaimed:

"You make a mistake, monsieur. Patrick is here!"



## CHAPTER XVI

### THE APPOINTMENT

**I**T was Surdon who had spoken. He seemed not less perturbed than I was. I took him in hand with an excitement which may easily be imagined.

"Patrick here!" I cried. "How do you know that?"

"I've seen him."

"When?"

"This morning."

"And since this morning couldn't you . . ."

"I've followed him, monsieur, and I can assure you that I haven't wasted my time."

"Out with it! Tell me what you know. The whole thing is awful."

"Yes, monsieur, awful."

"I shall kill him."

"Of course, that would be the best thing to do, for there's no question that he isn't chasing you."—The worthy Surdon dared not

make any allusion to "madame"—"This Patrick assumed that you would be passing through Venice. He's been expecting you here for the last three weeks. And since you came here he has pretty well lost his head."

"Oh, come, he has done that before, Surdon. But tell me everything you know down to the least detail."

"Well, it's like this. I was brushing your clothes this morning when I happened to put my nose out of a window, and caught sight of a man in a gondola staring with such persistence at our windows that I stopped my work. He did not see me. To come to the point—his eyes were fixed on madame's room."

"Was madame out?" I inquired breathlessly.

"No, monsieur, she was getting ready to go out, and you were waiting for her in the hall. Just then I recognized Patrick, and I continued to watch his game."

"Do you know if madame saw him?"

"I don't know. I can't be positive. The gondola stopped for a moment, then having

changed its course turned down towards the lagoon. I rushed out of the hotel just as you were leaving it with madame, and had the luck to reach the bend of the Riva degli Schiavoni as Patrick's gondola rounded the point. I took a gondola and followed him. My intention was to find out where he was staying. For hours he dragged me about to impossible and apparently uninteresting places. Finally he landed at the Grand Hotel where I was told that he had taken a room with the windows on the ground floor—I mean on a level with the water of the Grand Canal opposite Santa Maria della Salute.”—At the mention of this church I gave another start. —“The servant who waits upon him had no objection to give me certain particulars which, for that matter, show Patrick as the laughing-stock of the staff at the Grand Hotel . . .

“It seems, monsieur, that during the last four days he has regularly shut himself up in his room between five and seven o'clock after ordering a light meal for two persons to be served on a small round table.”

"A meal for two persons between five and seven o'clock!" I exclaimed, feeling a shiver pass through me from head to foot.

"Just so, monsieur. The servant has to lay two places, and the beauty of it is that no one has ever seen our man enter his room with another person, while he is always seen to come out alone. And yet this servant hasn't the least doubt that two persons sit down to this small round table and partake of the meal which has been served. It's a mystery which amuses every one, though Patrick doesn't appear to be aware of it, for he never speaks to a soul. He is generally looked upon as eccentric and even slightly mad. Most sensible people are of opinion that he is playing a part with himself and living upon past recollections . . . Good Lord, how pale you are! Perhaps I made a mistake to tell you all this. It would have been better to keep it from you that he was here."

"No, Surdon, you were quite right. You are a sharp and faithful servant. But, tell me, when did you leave the Grand Hotel?"

"Just now, monsieur."

"What about Patrick?"

"I left him shut up in his room as usual at this time."

I looked at my watch which shook in my hand.

"That's true," I said. "This is the hour for his meal. Wait for me in this gondola, Surdon. I shall be back soon."

I hastened to the hotel in a state of agitation which bordered on frenzy. I was unnerved, be it understood, less by the evidence which Surdon brought me of Patrick's renewed efforts to secure control of Cordélia's O, than by the apparent willingness with which my beloved consented to allow her polygon to be influenced by this most dangerous of tempters. The mere thought of it made me shake with fever, but could I doubt the truth when I recalled what had passed that very day between Cordélia and me? She had spoken in the most natural terms of her visit to the church of Santa Maria della Salute, and then perceiving, from my look of amazement, that her polygon had chattered too

freely, she at once enjoined it to be silent, blushing to the roots of her hair.

Not long before when she observed something abnormal passing between us, she threw her arms round my neck and cried: "Save me, Hector, save me!" but now she seemed to display only a certain embarrassment for having allowed the secret of a psychic condition to be discovered which ought to have been kept from me; the secret of another existence which she considered perhaps that I was unworthy to share, and which, in any case, no longer gave her a fright seeing that her O, after reflection, made no such request as: "Take me away!"

Was it not another who now took her away wherever he wished, if not with her complete assent—for in my delirium I strove to be just—at least with very little opposition from her? The pity of it! No, she made very little resistance, or else she would have warned me and cried aloud: "He has come back, the thief—the man who stole my love!"

Her O and her polygon were now in league to conceal this ignominy from me. For after

all, the nervous fluid, to use Dr. Thurel's words, is not strongly united to the body in certain subjects—and obviously Cordélia was among these—yet it is impossible to lure it far from its visible focus, the body, without producing a certain amount of suffering which in Cordélia's case formerly caused her to resist, while now she accepted it. Cordélia was failing me, for she was now accepting her suffering. It was a dreadful thought, a thought beyond all bearing.

These tragic considerations did not enter my mind, as may be imagined, only as the result of inferences which I drew from the scene with Cordélia that morning, but from my memory of various other little scenes of this kind which had impressed me less, because they were of less importance, but which now acquired their full significance, and that, too, from the first hour of our arrival in Venice.

Still, it was the terrible thought that during the last few days she had asked me to let her take a short rest before dressing for dinner, that made me mount the stairs four at a time, for the request, perhaps, concealed a subter-

fuge intended to keep me away during the great secret of the polygonal promenade.

Everything that Surdon had told me about Patrick's curious behavior at the Grand Hotel at that hour, merely strengthened the infernal idea which led to my accusing Cordélia of a veritable crime, the crime of premeditation, whereas it may have been simply a coincidence; but jealousy invariably goes to extremes and never feels satisfied unless it has multiplied its torments by some new supposition.

When out of breath I reached our rooms, however, I clung for a while to a last hope, the hope of discovering Cordélia standing before the glass putting the finishing touches to her evening toilet; but unfortunately the door of her room was locked and it was in vain that I shook it with all my strength.

"Cordélia! Cordélia!" I shouted, but there was no reply. I bent down and looked through the keyhole, and I saw her lying at full length on a sofa near the window in the rigid posture which had so greatly perturbed me at Vascoeuil.



I could not restrain a yell of fury and, clenching my fists and grinding my teeth, I ran to join Surdon in the gondola.

"As quickly as you can to the Grand Hotel," I ordered.

The gondola took us there in a few minutes. As we drew near, Surdon pointed to a window which was lit up on the right of the principal entrance, for at this time of the year it grew dark early.

"There you are," he said.

I at once propelled the gondola forward so that we hugged the foot of the wall and became merged in its shadow. We did not make the least sound.

When the gondola stopped under the window, I stood up and managed without difficulty to hold on to a small cornice, resting my elbow on the stone embrasure of the window. The latter was partly opened. I could thus both see and hear.

My excitement had reached its height, and I shall not attempt to describe it. Moreover, it is not difficult to conceive what passed through my mind from that moment, and the

feelings with which I was stirred by the spectacle which I alone could understand, and from which I alone was to suffer.

The two covers on the small round table which occupied the center of the room were close together; the two chairs were side by side. In one of them Patrick was seated, leaning over the other in an attitude of sentimental tenderness, while his face, like the face of a mournful cat, wore an expression of peace, not to say bliss, which made me long to rush into the room and box his ears. But I restrained myself.

A chandelier which shed a soft light on persons and things stood on the table. Why do I say "persons"? I observed only Patrick, and as to Cordélia, I failed to perceive her in spite of my concentrated will and strained attention. I would have given, at that moment, everything that I possessed to be able to see with the same facility as Patrick, who was assuredly caressing the exquisite outlines of Cordélia's astral figure.

O those eyes like the eyes of a mournful

cat, calm and content, while I was seething with excitement at the window!

How was it that I had the power to control my impulse? . . . I wanted to know more . . . And now I listened, for as he stretched out his hand to take an apple from the fruit-dish and place it on Cordélia's plate, he began to speak:

"A union of minds begets sympathy, and from this sympathy is born real love, compared with which the other is but the blind instrument of nature in the fulfilment of its essential functions."

I shall remember that sentence for the rest of my life.

"The bond which unites us, O Cordélia"—he used the words "O Cordélia" and I felt as if my heart were being pierced with a sword—"the bond which unites us recognizes no impediment; nothing can restrain it, nothing can shatter it; it can penetrate walls, traverse space, set time at defiance. It partakes of the divine essence," and so on and so forth.

I could not repeat everything that he said in this strain while peeling a pear which he

shared with her—I mean the half of which he laid on the plate beside his own.

I must confess that his gestures perplexed me more than his speechifying. To me it was unendurable that he should lean over the next chair, and I experienced an uncanny feeling as I saw him lift a glass of wine to his lips which he had previously placed in space on his right on a level with a mouth, which had, perhaps also drunk from it.

“The wretches are drinking out of the same glass,” I muttered between my teeth. “Don’t mind me!”

I was in such “good training” by the psychic phenomena of which I had been the victim since my wedding-day, and also by the scientific explanations to which I had listened, and by that which I still saw, that nothing could surprise me, and the impossibility for an astral body to swallow the material substance of a meal did not occur to me at first. It was not until I had seen for myself that the wine was entirely drunk by Patrick, and the food on Cordélia’s plate conveyed in the end to his plate, that I gave up this absurdly

fantastic idea, which shows once more that the mind deflected from its accustomed groove easily loses all sense of proportion, and is ready to open the door to every form of self-deception; and my delusion at that cruel moment when others beside myself might likewise have lost their common sense, was to believe in the reality of this fallacy—of this farce which was being played between Patrick and Cordélia's astral body when under his influence. The real truth was that they provided themselves with the vision and delight of a little dinner for two in this room, but the person who was in fact eating it could only be Patrick.

And as he drank wine for two, which seemed to me to be tokay, he looked less like a mournful cat, and began to talk nonsense which was not without a touch of humor.

As it happened he spoke of the material limits which his magnetic power encountered.

"It is a pity," he said, "that I cannot attract your body here as I can attract your sensibility, but that is a miracle, for all we know, which psychic science, which is still in its

infancy, may achieve in the near future. See what has already been done in the matter of table turning. The day when those idiots—I am referring to official experts—cease to laugh at these phenomena, we shall not be far from discovering the method which will enable the unseen mind to control visible matter. On that day we shall learn something that Newton did not know, namely, that gravitation is a variable quantity in space.\*

“That reminds me of a rather amusing story that old Sardou used to tell, my dear Cordélia”—how it hurt me to hear him say “My dear Cordélia!”—“He said ‘I can make this table jump out of the window when and as I please. One day two friends were taking their coffee on it. I commanded the table to move. It remained motionless. When they left I lectured the table. Do you know what it said in reply? “They are such fools!” ’ ”

Whereupon Patrick began to laugh, and I seemed to hear Cordélia laugh as well. Their gaiety disturbed me more than their gloom of

\* Einstein has since merely repeated the words used by Cordélia's admirer and given a mathematical formula to his theory. Author's Note.

a few minutes before. Suddenly they stopped laughing, and began to converse in complete silence.

I was absolutely convinced of it.

They were talking and understanding each other. It is generally recognized that subjects and mediums and persons who have it in them to control the mind can converse among themselves without the aid of sounds, by the mere power of suggestion, and communion. When Patrick spoke from the throat it was done over and above his psychic power, from habit, and possibly to give himself the illusion to which, whatever he may have said, he seemed to set store, of Cordélia's bodily presence beside him in his room, but the use of his voice was unnecessary. He was now speaking to her with the voice of the mind.

And there could be no doubt that Cordélia was answering him, for it must not be assumed that I was witnessing, in this extraordinary and loathsome seance, a monologue. Far from it. But when Patrick used his ordinary voice there were pauses which were undoubtedly furnished with Cordélia's answers. Patrick's re-

marks which followed were a sufficient proof of it.

I was more or less aware of what was passing, but now they were conversing in silence. What were they saying? Why was Patrick bending over her with his right arm resting on the back of her chair? . . . I could perceive a tremulous movement of his arm . . .

Suddenly he raised his head and said aloud: "It is unfair of me to reproach heaven for not giving you to me body and soul, because your soul is mine and I have the best part of your body." And then he took his glass in his left hand without moving his right hand which still shook as it lay on the back of Cordélia's chair, and exclaimed: "I have tasted your lips O Cordélia. I have tasted your life. I drink to our longing for everlasting love!"

He had no sooner poured the glass of wine down his throat than I sprang into the room.

It seemed that I was literally foaming with rage. He himself said so afterwards, and it was, in truth, quite possible, for my patience which my restless and insidious curiosity had



held in check, was exhausted, and I was overcome with fury.

I rushed up to *them* and cried:

"I'm thirsty too. Aren't you going to invite me?"

He stood up and thrust himself in my path as though to shield her.

"How clumsy you are! You have wounded her," he murmured, stooping to pick up a knife which, when I darted to the table had fallen to the floor.

"What do you mean—'wounded her?'" I said excitedly.

"Calm yourself, monsieur," he returned with characteristic English coolness. "Indeed, it's nothing, though it might have been serious. Let this be a lesson to you. Another time, don't forget to knock at the door or the window." He spoke in a tone which set me beside myself.

"It shall never happen again," I said hoarsely, casting a glance in the direction of Cordelia's chair.

"Oh, you may finish what you were saying,"

he interrupted with a gesture of encouragement. "We are alone. She is no longer here."

"Well, monsieur, what I wish to say is simply this—there are two of us here, which is one too many."

"That's my opinion, monsieur," he acquiesced, "but it's not I who am in the way."

"We shall see about that—to-morrow!"

"Just as you please."

I had nothing more to say to him that day, and I turned towards the window, but he opened the door for me, and we bowed to each other with perfect propriety.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE DUEL

**W**HEN I read over again the preceding pages I find nothing in them to eliminate, for they truthfully set down the intolerable situation in which I found myself after Surdon informed me of Patrick's presence in Venice. In my belief I had good reason for suspecting that my beloved's ego had yielded without any great resistance to the whims of culpable hypnotic suggestion. And when I conjure up the vision of the meeting in the little room in the Grand Hotel, I see myself again as I was then, that is to say, less distracted by rage against Patrick than tortured by Cordélia's apparent acquiescence.

Fool that I was! Ought I not in my ignorance of the tremendous nature of psychic mystery, or in my mistrust of it as an entirely new initiate, to have warned Cordélia of all that ap-

peared suspect and impossible to understand in it? And yet I took a bitter pleasure in my misery!

In short, my blood was fired by those fatuous words: "It wouldn't have happened if she hadn't wanted it to happen." And it was with these words on my lips and this injustice to her in my heart, that I hastened back to the Hotel Danieli.

\* \* \* \* \*

Cordélia, whom I found still lying on the sofa, had just awakened from her sleep, and was wrapping a piece of linen round her finger, an incident to which in my agitation I attached no importance. The chamber maid was offering her a thread of cotton. I requested her to leave us.

At the sound of my voice Cordélia gave a start and raised her head, and I perceived that she was deadly pale.

"Patrick is here and you know it," I cried savagely. "Why didn't you tell me?"

She contemplated my wrath first with dumb amazement, and then with dismay. She seemed no longer to know me. I had ceased

to be her Hector. She wisely remained silent. What could she say to a raging lion who neither heard nor understood reason.

Then I went on wildly:

"You deny yourself nothing. Trips in gondolas, art galleries, churches—the Santa Maria della Salute!"

At these last words she murmured:

"Oh, good gracious, so it was true! I thought it was only a dream."

Her words ought to have enlightened me and taught me that she was still the victim of the endless machinations of that man. But I had set out to make us both suffer, and I was not to be stopped mid-way.

"You meet every day between five and seven o'clock."

"What do you say?"

And Cordélia lifted herself, and opened her eyes wide with wonder, as if she began to discover from the sound of my voice now that she was awake, the impressions which had been transmitted to her polygon while she was asleep.

"I say that you take advantage of my con-

fidence. While I thought that you were resting here, you were off having a meal with Patrick in his room in the Grand Hotel."

She uttered a cry and covered her face with her hands.

"Oh don't deny it. I saw you. I heard you."

"What did you hear? Did I tell him that I loved him?" she asked in a voice strained with anxiety.

"I didn't hear you say that," I returned, surprised at the tone in which she asked the question, "but you know quite well that I cannot hear your 'silent voice.'"

"If I didn't say that I said nothing," she declared gazing at me with staring eyes. "All else is beyond me."

So saying she lay back on the sofa, her whole body shaken by a fit of sobbing.

I fell on my knees. The horror of my conduct and at the same time Cordelia's innocence, became manifest to me. Dear, dear, dear Cordelia!

I hated myself. I strove to assuage her

grief. I took her hand, and then I saw that the strip of linen round her finger was quite red.

"Your finger is bleeding, Cordélia. Have you cut it?"

"I suppose I knocked it against a piece of furniture when I woke up," she said between her tears.

"It's not imagination," I said with a tremor, unwinding the linen, for Dr. Thurel's explanation of the meaning of the externalization of sensibility flashed through my mind. "No, it was not imagination, unfortunately, and here we have the sad proof of it. When you, in mind, were at the Grand Hotel, I burst into the room with such violence as to disturb everything, and a knife which was on the table fell to the floor and Patrick exclaimed: 'She is wounded!' "

This time Cordélia rose to her feet so white-faced, that she might have been taken for her own ghost.

"How could you think that I did not love you?" she breathed. "It's my heart's blood that is flowing from the wound which you in-

flicted on me in Patrick's room. Do you understand what I mean?" \*

I was still on my knees, and when I heard those glorious words I clasped her in my trembling arms and implored her to forgive me, but her mind was possessed with some other thought, and I realized that it was this thought which was the cause of her pallor.

"What did you say to each other afterwards?" she asked.

I was at a loss for an answer and could but stammer a falsehood.

"Swear to me, that there will be no fighting."

I was constrained to swear that there should be no fighting, but she was unconvinced.

"You have sworn falsely. That's too bad of you. Never mind. I don't want you to fight each other. You mustn't fight each other. I shall go with you everywhere."

\* The following note was discovered among Hector's papers:

In regard to pains and wounds transmitted to a subject from a distance as in the peculiar case of the glass of water mentioned by Dr. Rochas, see also instances quoted by Dr. Chazalin in his work on "Materializations." Cases have been known where violent blows have been transmitted from a distance to subjects in profound trance, in plain daylight, with the result that these subjects have borne marks of the hand and scratches and bruises on the face. Author's note.



I could have wished that she had said: "I don't want you to fight him."

She so managed that it was impossible for me to leave the hotel, and as I was bent on getting rid of my adversary, once for all, I was obliged to send Surdon to him, without her knowledge, in order to let him know what was happening, and to request him to take upon himself the burden of providing weapons, seconds and so forth. I asked that the duel should take place at dawn, for I intended to slip away while Cordélia was in her morning sleep which would not fail to be a heavy one after the excitement through which she had passed.

Surdon came back to tell me that there was no need for me to trouble about anything except to appear at daybreak at the Comte de C——'s house, which stood at the far end of what are called the "public gardens."

Cordélia had regained her composure. We strolled to the Piazzetta, and even went as far as the Café de Florian, where we drank port to the music of the guitar. The scene around us was one of great gaiety. I did my utmost to appear cheerful also, but Cordélia remained

gloomily wrapped in thought. When we returned to the hotel she declared that she would not go to bed.

"I don't believe you. You didn't speak the truth. If I go to bed you'll seize the opportunity to leave the hotel and fight a duel. I don't want you to fight each other."

I shrugged my shoulders to indicate that it was a matter of indifference to me, but I was intensely annoyed. I had a wonderful and legitimate opportunity of getting rid of the author of my misfortunes—we were to fight with pistols, and I was certain of bringing my man down—and now Cordélia's obstinacy bid fair to compromise everything. Fortunately I was able to send Surdon again to tell Patrick what was happening, for I saw no way out of the difficulty unless he consented to send Cordélia into a hypnotic trance so that I might be able to get away and fight him. I would never have believed that one day I should be making an appeal of this character to the man whose psychic powers were the cause of my troubles. But let that pass. The whole incident shows once more that whatever conception we may

form of the world, and the relation which subsists between spirit and matter, we are but an atom of dust dancing in a momentary ray of the sun.

Surdon came back with a message from the Englishman that he was not less anxious than I was for the duel to take place, and he would carry out my wishes.

I passed a grievous night, a night which seemed interminable. The torture of it! If I had but known what was about to happen! If I had but known! With what dread I should have counted the minutes as they all too quickly sped past!

Cordélia kept her word. Say and do what I might, she would not go to bed. She lay on the sofa reading, or pretending to read. And I—I stood watching her.

I was waiting with impatience for the event which my adversary had promised to bring about. It occurred shortly after five o'clock in the morning. Her eyes closed, her book fell from her hands to the floor, and her body assumed the rigid posture which I recognized only too well.

I locked the door of the room, put the key in my pocket, and then called Surdon. At six o'clock we arrived at the Comte de C——'s house.

Patrick had not yet come, but the doctor and the seconds were already there. Two seconds were allotted to me. I made their acquaintance and was entirely satisfied. The Comte de C——, who belonged to the old Venetian nobility, was away, but he was, it seems, greatly interested in art and artists, and had placed his house at Patrick's disposal.

The public gardens in Venice are well known. They occupy one of the few islets in the old city which have not been encroached upon by the builder. Nevertheless the Comte de C——'s mansion stood there and possessed a private entrance to the gardens after the manner of private houses in the Monceau Gardens in Paris. Here the Comte de C—— alone enjoyed this privilege, so that at that hour, when the gardens were closed, it was as though we were in the Comte's own private property.

Meantime Patrick made his appearance, unarmed, as I swore at the Assize Court. The

revolvers were in the cases which the seconds brought with them, and which they obtained the evening before at a gunsmith's. Patrick had no knowledge of the weapons; at least so he declared, and I believe him. Moreover we drew lots and agreed that the revolvers which the seconds had brought with them should be used.

We were now in the great central walk of the gardens. I have heard that in spring it is a lovely spot, an enchantment, with beds of roses which are nothing short of marvelous; but it was the fall of the year, and I beheld in the wan light of early morning a somewhat dreary place, well suited to be the scene of a terrible tragedy.

And, indeed, the thing happened with incredible rapidity. The twenty-five paces which were to separate us were marked out. We were to exchange four shots. But I am a crack shot with a revolver, and I felt certain of bringing my man down at the first attempt. I had made up my mind to it, and I had no scruple of remorse. I felt that there was no happiness

for me with Cordélia in this world as long as Patrick was alive. Let him go to the devil!

I was perfectly cool when the words rang out: "Fire! One . . . two . . . three!" We fired almost simultaneously as the second in charge of the duel shouted: "Two!" Patrick, however, fired in the air uttering a despairing cry. I had already fired my shot on a level with his heart, and yet I must confess that I was conscious that he had not uttered that cry because he was struck by my bullet. Indeed he was not hit. To this cry another cry of unutterable anguish went up. It sprang from my throat, and my heart, and yet I was not hit either. The only person whose cry of agony we did not hear, was the person who was smitten. And I swear before God and man that my cry was torn from me by the vision of Cordélia's form which suddenly arose between us at the moment when our fingers were pressing the trigger; but Patrick had the time to raise his weapon, while I fired mine.

The image vanished almost as quickly as it appeared. I swear that Cordélia's astral body, which until then—save in the mirror of the

water, and here I must ask myself whether I was not the sport of the water and my imagination—had remained unseen by my physical vision, now appeared before me quite distinctly. This phenomenon, moreover, so fully supported the many other well-known instances where the spirit of a person has appeared to beloved relatives at the very moment when it throws off, for ever, its mortal covering, that I grasped the meaning of Patrick's cry of dismay, for he too had seen.

"Unhappy man!" he cried. "Unhappy man, what have you done!"

My hair must have stood on end with horror and both of us were conscious only of a feeling of unspeakable dread.

Without concerning ourselves with the seconds, or making the least explanation, we left the entire business of the duel and hurriedly flung ourselves into a gondola. Not a word was spoken on the way. Moreover I felt that I should go mad.

On reaching the hotel we made a rush for Cordélia's room. Everything seemed quiet, and precisely as I had left it. I was filled with

a great hope; and yet my hand shook so much that I was unable to put the key in the lock. It was Patrick who opened the door.

We darted into the room. Cordélia was still lying on the sofa, but her face already wore an unearthly look, and drops of blood stained her dressing-gown near her throat. She had been killed by a bullet through the heart.



## CHAPTER XVIII

AND NOW . . .

**A**ND now this pierced heart which the greatest thief that ever lived had burgled from its bodily prison is all mine. I can kneel in peace before the urn in which I have reverently enclosed it. No one can rob me of it now.

It was when it was still swayed by all the emotions of life, it was when its ardent beating animated an adored wife, that a villain strove to make a splendid victim of it, and to take it by force from my very arms; but now when it is no more than a little dust and a great memory, no one will contend with me for it.

During the terrible proceedings at the Assize Court, where the case was regarded as the most extraordinary that had come before the ordinary judicial bench within the memory of man, I clearly perceived that the man who stole Cordélia's heart no longer cared about her who had been his victim. Not once in the

course of the trial, which excited, without satisfying, the world's curiosity—not once did the thief cast a glance on the table in which lay the material evidence—this sacred relic which had come from the hands of the “experts”; while I, alas, could not remove my sorrow-stricken eyes from it.

O heart of Cordélia, I alone loved thee! My rival was never anything but an artist . . . But I, O Cordélia, I was never anything but a poor man in love, and I am still but a poor man in love before your dead heart as I was before your living heart . . . The little that I may have of you I am taking away. With a trembling hand I have removed your beloved heart from its legal receptacle to this funeral urn. It will never, I think, be stolen from me again.

I no longer feel the shadow of the thief over me. And yet in spite of my perfect assurance of peace I have had another lock placed on the door of the retreat to which I have withdrawn from my fellow-men.

I have endeavored in this seclusion to fulfil the chief duty which I owe to myself and

others. I have set down here the various circumstances which, to my knowledge, preceded, paved the way for, and accompanied the terrible tragedy. I have told in plain language how these things came to pass, even though they may seem entirely improbable. If the reader will follow me step by step and believe me, he will understand.

It was because the Assize Court did not believe me that they failed to understand. And yet I did not spare myself. I took on my own shoulders the responsibility for the whole fatal incident. Why did they not proceed against me? I say that it was I who killed her . . . The misery of it! I may rejoice to-day that Cordélia's heart will not again be stolen from me, because it is dead. And it was I who killed it. I shout it aloud and I repeat: Do not doubt it since I myself no longer doubt it.

The preliminary investigation took some time, and was postponed by the illness which came upon me as a result of the tragedy. When I was in a position to give evidence I found that the authorities were on the wrong scent as was to be expected.

Surdon, for instance, was arrested on the plea that he possessed a revolver from which one bullet had been discharged. It was alleged that he had made his way into his mistress's room while she was asleep in order to steal her jewelry.

This was so much obtuseness and stupidity, and how could it be otherwise? The judges were confronted with the case of a woman killed by a bullet through the heart in a room every part of which was closed, the windows being shut on the inside and the door locked.

The most amazing thing was that a minute search failed to reveal the bullet. It had passed through the body, but it could not be found either in the sofa or walls. I myself knew where the bullet was. It was somewhere in the public gardens in Venice.

The police were obliged to release Surdon, but they afterwards arrested Patrick and kept him in custody until the trial at the Assize Court. A post-mortem examination was held, and the expert's report showed that death was caused not by a shot from a revolver, but by a shot from a pistol of the same bore as that of

the pistols which Patrick had procured for use at the duel.

As the magisterial enquiries proved that Patrick was prowling round the Hotel Danieli during the night preceding and the morning of the duel, nothing more was needed to enable the authorities to accuse him of having entered Cordélia's room at the hotel by means of some master key, or some key that he managed to obtain beforehand from an accommodating servant whom he had bribed to assist him in his nefarious purpose. He had shot Cordélia out of jealousy to prevent her from belonging to another if he were killed in the duel . . . It was simple . . . How very simple it was! . . . Poor human nature!

The trouble was that a pistol shot causes a concussion, and no one in the hotel had heard the least sound.

In vain Patrick denied the charge, recounting stories about the power of suggestion and the communion of minds which made the Court laugh. The reason for his presence near the Hotel Danieli on this particular night was that I had requested him to send Cordélia to sleep

so that she should not interfere with our plan to fight each other, and Cordélia could only be influenced by suggestion within a limited distance.

When I corroborated his statement, and gave it as my opinion that Cordélia had been killed in the Hotel Danieli by a shot fired by me in the public gardens in Venice, the judges ceased to smile and evinced considerable wrath. I was looked upon as a madman by some, and a fool by others, and these people were greatly incensed with me for not joining them in crushing Patrick. Cordélia's father could not forgive me for it, and left me to myself with contempt.

The press agencies reported the result as far as Patrick was concerned in a few lines. The material proofs were too slight to justify a conviction, and the jury acquitted him in spite of the efforts of the public prosecutor.

Had the European political situation been less troubled, and had the trial not taken place in a foreign country, the facts would not have failed to create a tremendous sensation, as they deserved, for they brought the judicial bench

face to face with the greatest conceivable drama, namely that which is enacted between the seen and the unseen worlds.

Those dullards were utterly nonplused. I can still picture to myself their look of confusion when Dr. Thurel, who was called as a witness for the defense, explained that it was not absolutely impossible, from the scientific standpoint, for Cordélia to have been killed by a bullet which struck her astral body in the public gardens in Venice. That is what Dr. Thurel called death by astral traumatism . . .

There is a Latin phrase which expresses it, a phrase which was in use in the middle ages, but I cannot call it to mind.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE LAST VISIT

**O** CORDÉLIA, you died by my hand! If I still live, be assured that it is by way of atonement. How often have I conjured up your image before the mortal remains of your heart! How often have I called to you! But you have never come to me!

For many days I was unable to add a word to these lines, and I remained, as it were, paralyzed by the inscrutable mystery of life and death, when one day the door of my cell was opened, and a man came in. It was Patrick. He was but the shadow of his former self.

I thrust myself before the urn which contained my beloved's heart. He understood me and gave a bitter smile.

"Have no fear," he said, "I leave it to you. What is her earthly heart to me? I possess her heart which is in Heaven."



I rose to my feet staggering like a drunken man under his words which filled me with an agony of jealousy.

"What do you mean?" I asked hoarsely.  
"Do you still see Cordélia?"

He shook his head.

"Calm yourself, I do not see her," he made answer. "She is too remote from us, and I have never believed in spirits of the dead revisiting this world. When I say that I possess her heart which is in Heaven, I mean that I did possess it. Death has deprived me of it," he went on in somber, intense tones, "but death will restore it to me."

"No more of that," I exclaimed. "What has all this to do with me?"

"Well, if you look upon it in that light I don't know why I am here."

"Nor I."

"I came to you, monsieur," he said in a voice of wonderful dignity, "to ask you if you have any message for her, for she loved you sincerely—you too!"

"She loved me only," I asserted, yet strangely perturbed by his manner and words.

He sighed and shook his head once more.

"You thought so, but that was impossible," he objected gently, "otherwise she would still be of this world."

"So it was you who killed her, or at least were responsible for her death? I always thought so!"

"It was you and I. It was both of us," he declared in a tone of great dejection. "Yes, I, on my side, was to blame. I was too eager in my frenzy, in my longing for her spirit, in the love which consumed me for her ego, to separate her mind from her body, but you—you were too eager to separate her body from her mind. We were marching toward an inevitable catastrophe."

His words struck me like a sword, and I did not interrupt him.

"It shows," he went on, turning toward the door, "that we can only give happiness to a being of this world if we bring to her a well-balanced mind which we were unable to do. Had Cordélia met a little of you and a little of me, in one and the same man, she would have been happy; at least I like to think so. But

where she is now her spirit needs only her mind.  
I am going to her! . . . Farewell, monsieur!"

\* \* \* \* \*

I read this morning in the newspapers the announcement of Patrick's death. It shall not be said that I allowed him to pursue Cordélia at his will. I hear her calling me: "Save me, Hector! Save me!"

I, too, intend to become a pure spirit, and the sooner to achieve my purpose, I shall make the same journey as Cordélia, and by the same route. Though Patrick set out first he will arrive too late. He will be deceived. The heart of Cordélia points the way that lies before me. The bullet will enter my heart at the same spot at which it pierced Cordélia's heart. I shall breathe the same sigh which will lead me to the same point in space where she awaits me . . . I am persuaded of it! . . .

Dear, dear, dear Cordélia!

## **A TERRIBLE TALE**



## A TERRIBLE TALE

**C**APTAIN MICHEL had but one arm, which he found useful when he lit his pipe. He was an old sea dog whose acquaintance, with that of four other old salts, I made one evening on the open front of a café in the Vieille Darse, Toulon, where I was taking an appetizer. And in this way we fell into the habit of foregathering over a glass within a stone's throw of the rippling waves and the swinging dingies, about the hour when the sun sinks behind Tamaris.

The four old marines were known as Zinzin, Dorat—Captain Dorat—Bagatelle, and Chanlieu—that old fellow Chanlieu. They had, of course, sailed every sea and met with a thousand adventures; and now that they were retired on their pensions, they spent their time telling each other terrible tales.

Captain Michel alone never indulged in any reminiscences. And as he seemed in no way

surprised by anything he heard, his old comrades in the end grew exasperated with him.

"Look here, Captain Michel, hasn't anything out of the way ever happened to you?"

"Oh, yes," the captain made answer, taking his pipe from his mouth. "Yes, something happened to me once—just once."

"Well, let's have it."

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because it's too awful. You might not be able to stand it. I've often tried to tell the story but people have slipped away before I finished it."

The four sea dogs vied with each other in the loudness of their guffaws, declaring that Captain Michel was trying to find some excuse, because in reality, nothing extraordinary had ever happened to him.

The old fellow stared at them a moment, and then suddenly accepting the situation, laid his pipe on the table. This unusual gesture was in itself startling!

"Messieurs, I'll tell you how I lost my arm," he began.

"In those days—some twenty years ago—I owned a small villa, in the suburb of Le Mourillon, which had been left to me, for my family were long settled in these parts and I myself was born here.

"It suited me to take a little rest after a long voyage and before setting sail again. For that matter, I rather liked the place, and lived quite peaceably among sea-faring men and colonials who troubled me very little, and whom I rarely saw, occupied as they were as a rule in opium-smoking with their lady friends, or with other business which did not concern me. Of course there is no accounting for tastes, but as long as they didn't interfere with me, I was satisfied. . . .

"It so happened that one night they did interfere with my habit of going to sleep. I was awakened with a start by an extraordinary uproar, the meaning of which I couldn't possibly make out. I had left my window open as usual. I listened in a state of bewilderment to a tremendous din, which was a cross between the rumbling of thunder and the roll of a drum, but such a drum! It was as though a couple of



hundred drumsticks were being madly beaten, not on ordinary drum-skin, but on a wooden drum.

“The disturbance came from the villa opposite, which had been empty for some five years, and on which I had noticed, the previous evening, a board bearing the announcement: ‘To be sold.’

“I let my gaze stray from the window of my bedroom, on the first floor, beyond the small garden in which the house stood, and my eye took in every door and window, even the doors and windows on the ground floor. They were still closed as I had seen them during the day; but I caught sight of gleams of light through the chinks in the shutters on the ground floor. Who and what were these people? How had they found their way into this solitary house at the far end of Le Mourillon? What sort of company was it that had obtained admission into this deserted dwelling, and why were they kicking up such a shindy?

“The extraordinary din, like the thunderous beating of a wooden drum, continued. It went on for another hour, and then as dawn was

breaking, the front door opened, and there appeared in the doorway the most radiant creature that I have ever beheld. She was clad in a low-necked dress, and held with perfect grace a lamp whose beams fell over the shoulders of a goddess. I distinctly heard her say in the echoing night, while a kind and quiet smile flickered across her face:

“‘Good-bye, dear friend, till next year.’

“To whom was she speaking? It was impossible for me to tell for I could see no one standing beside her. She remained at the entrance holding the lamp for some minutes, until the garden gate opened by itself and closed by itself. Then the front door of the house was shut in its turn, and I saw nothing more.

“It seemed to me that I was either losing my head or was the sport of a dream, for I knew that it was out of the question for any one to pass through the garden without my perceiving him.

“I was still planted at the window, incapable of the least movement or thought, when the door of the house opened a second time, and

the same vision of beauty appeared still carrying a lamp and still alone.

“‘Hush,’ she said, ‘don’t make a noise, any of you. We mustn’t disturb our neighbor opposite. I’ll come with you.’

“And silently and alone she crossed the garden and stopped at the gate on which the full rays of the lamp shone; so much so, indeed, that I clearly saw the knob of the gate turn of its own accord without any hand being placed upon it. And the gate opened once again by itself in the presence of this woman who, moreover, did not evince any surprise. Need I explain that from where I was posted, I could see both in front and behind the gate; in other words, that I saw it sideways?

“This ‘splendid apparition’ made a charming movement of her head toward the empty darkness which the glare of the lamp made visible; then she smiled and said:

“‘Well, good-bye until next year. My husband is very pleased. Not a single one of you failed to answer the call. Good-bye, messieurs.’

“And I heard several voices in unison:

“‘Good-bye, madame, good-bye, dear madame, until next year.’

“And as the mysterious hostess was preparing to close the door herself, I heard a voice:

“‘Oh, please, don’t trouble.’

“And the door was once more closed.

“The next moment the air was filled with a curious sound; it was like the chirping of a flock of birds, and it seemed as if this beautiful woman had opened the cage of a whole brood of house sparrows.

“She quietly walked back to the house. The lights on the ground floor were then out, but I noticed a glimmer in the windows of the first floor.

“When she reached the house she said:

“‘Are you upstairs, Gérard?’

“I could not hear the answer, but the front door was again closed, and a few minutes later the light on the first floor went out.

“I was still standing at my window at eight o’clock in the morning, staring in blank amazement at the house and garden which had revealed such strange happenings in darkness, and which now in the full light of day assumed

their familiar aspect. The garden was a waste, and the house itself seemed as desolate as it was the day before.

“So much so, indeed, that when I told my old charwoman who had just come, of the queer events which I had witnessed, she tapped my forehead with her dirty forefinger and muttered that I had smoked one pipe too many. Now I have never been a smoker of opium, and her answer gave me a good opportunity of sacking the old sloven whom I had for some time wanted to get rid of, and who came for a couple of hours each day to ‘clean up’ the place for me. For that matter I did not need any one, as I was setting sail again next day.

“I barely had time to put my things together, make a few purchases, say farewell to my friends, and catch the train for Havre. I had fixed up an appointment with the Transatlantic company which would keep me away from Toulon for some eleven or twelve months.

“In due course I returned to Toulon, but though I had refrained from mentioning my adventure to a soul, I still continued to think of it. The vision of the lady of the lamp ob-

sessed me wherever I went, and the last words which she uttered to her unseen friends still rang in my ears:

“ ‘Well, good-bye until next year.’ ”

“And I never ceased to think of the meeting. I, too, was determined to be there and to discover, at whatever cost, the solution of a mystery which was intensely perplexing to a sensible man like myself, who did not believe in ghosts or phantom vessels.

“Unfortunately I was soon to learn that neither heaven nor hell was concerned in the terrible story.

“It was six o'clock in the evening when I set foot again in my house at Toulon; and it was two days before the anniversary of the wonderful night.

“The first thing that I did on going inside was to run up to my room and open the window. It was summer and broad daylight, and my eyes at once fell upon a lady of great beauty who was placidly walking about gathering flowers in the garden of the house opposite. At the noise made by the opening window she looked up.

"It was the lady of the lamp. I recognized her, and she seemed not less beautiful by day than by night. Her skin was as white as the teeth of an African nigger, her eyes bluer than the waters at Tamaris, her hair as soft and fair as the finest flax.

"Why should I not make the confession? When I beheld this woman of whom I had been dreaming for a year, a strange feeling came over me. She was no illusion of a diseased imagination. She stood before me in the flesh; and every window of the house was open and flower-bedecked by her hands. There was nothing fantastic in all this.

"She caught sight of me and at once displayed some degree of annoyance. She walked a few steps farther in the center path of the garden, and then shrugging her shoulders as though she were disconcerted said:

"'Let's go in, Gérard. I'm beginning to feel the coolness of the night.'

"I let my gaze stray round the garden. I could perceive no one. To whom was she speaking? . . . Nobody there!

"Then was she mad? It scarcely seemed so.

"I watched her return to the house. She passed into it, the door was closed, and she at once shut the windows.

"I did not see or hear anything worth noticing that night. Next morning at ten o'clock I observed my neighbor leaving the garden attired as if for a walk. She locked the gate after her and set out in the direction of Toulon.

"I started off in my turn. Pointing to the fashionably dressed figure in front of me I asked the first tradesman whom I met if he knew the lady's name.

" 'Why, of course. She's your neighbor. She is living with her husband at the Villa Makoko. They moved in about a year ago, just as you went away. They are regular boors. They never speak to anybody, unless it's absolutely necessary, but every one in Le Mourillon, as you know, goes his own way, and is never surprised at anything. The captain for one . . . '

" 'What captain?'

" 'Captain Gérard. It seems he is an ex-



captain of marines. Well, no one ever sees him . . . Sometimes when food has to be delivered at the house, and the lady is not in, some person shouts out an order from behind the door to leave the stuff on the step, and waits until you are a good distance away before taking it in.'

"You can imagine that I was growing more and more puzzled. I went to Toulon in order to ask the agent who let the villa a few questions about these people. He, likewise, had never seen the husband, but he told me that his name was Gérard Beauvisage.

"When I heard the name I uttered a cry: 'Gérard Beauvisage! Why I know him!'

"I had an old friend of that name whom I had not seen for twenty-five years. He was an officer in the marines and had left Toulon for Tonkin about that period. How could I doubt that it was he? At all events, I had a straightforward reason for calling on him, that very evening, though he was expecting a visit from his friends, for it was the anniversary of the famous night. I made up my mind to renew my old friendship with him.

"When I got back to Le Mourillon I espied

in front of me, in the sunk road leading to the Villa Makoko, the figure of my neighbor. I did not hesitate, but hastened to overtake her.

“‘Have I the honor of speaking to Madame Beauvisage, the wife of Captain Gérard Beauvisage?’ I asked with a bow.

“She colored and tried to pass on without answering me.

“‘Madame, I am your neighbor, Captain Michel Alban,’ I persisted.

“‘Oh, please forgive me, monsieur,’ she returned, ‘my husband has often spoken of you . . . Captain Michel Alban . . .’

“She seemed terribly ill at ease, and yet in her confusion she was more beautiful than ever, if that were possible. In spite of her obvious desire to elude me I went on:

“‘How comes it that Captain Beauvisage has returned to France without letting his old friend know? I shall be particularly obliged if you will tell Gérard that I’m coming to shake hands with him this very evening.’

“And observing that she was hastening her steps, I bowed, but as I was speaking she

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turned round, betraying an agitation which was more and more difficult to comprehend.

“ ‘Impossible to-night . . . I promise to tell Gérard of our meeting. That’s the most I can do. Gérard doesn’t wish to see any one—any one. He lives alone . . . We live alone . . . And we took the house because we were told that the next house was occupied only for a few days once or twice a year by some one who is never seen! . . . ’

“And she added in a voice tinged with sadness:

“ ‘You must forgive Gérard, monsieur. We do not receive any one—any one. Good day, monsieur.’

“ ‘Madame, the Captain and you receive friends occasionally,’ I returned with some impatience. ‘For instance, to-night you are expecting friends with whom you made an appointment a year ago.’

“She flushed scarlet.

“ ‘Oh, but that’s an exceptional case . . . that’s an absolutely exceptional case . . . They are our very particular friends.’

“Having said which she made her escape,

but at once stopped her retreat and turned back.

“‘Whatever you do, don’t call to-night,’ she entreated, and disappeared into the garden.

“I returned to my house and began to keep watch on my neighbors. They did not show themselves, and long before it was dark I saw the shutters being closed and lights gleaming through the openings, such as I had seen on that amazing night a year ago. But I did not hear the same extraordinary din like the thunderous beating of a wooden drum.

“At seven o’clock I began to dress for I called to mind the low-necked robe worn by the lady of the lamp. Madame Beauvisage’s last words had but strengthened my determination. The captain was seeing some of his friends that evening; he dared not refuse me admission. After dressing it crossed my mind, before I went downstairs, to put my revolver in my pocket, but in the end I left it in its place, considering that to take it would be an act of stupidity.

“The stupidity lay in not taking it with me.

“On reaching the entrance to the Villa

Makoko I turned the handle of the gate on the off chance—the handle which last year I had seen turn by itself. And to my intense surprise the door opened. Therefore my neighbors were expecting visitors. I walked up to the house and knocked at the door.

“‘Come in!’ a voice cried.

“I recognized Gérard’s voice. I walked gaily into the house. I passed first through the hall, and then as the door of a small drawing-room stood open, and the room was lit up, I entered it.

“‘Gérard it’s me,’ I exclaimed, ‘your old pal Michel Alban.’

“‘Oh, really, so you made up your mind to come, my dear old Michel! I told my wife only just now that you would come and I should be glad to see you . . . But you are the only one, apart from our particular friends . . . Do you know, my dear Michel, you haven’t altered much . . .’

“It would be impossible for me to describe my stupefaction. I heard Gérard, but I could not see him. His voice rang in my ears, but no

one was near me, no one was in the drawing-room. The Voice went on:

“ ‘Sit down, won’t you? My wife will soon be here, for she will remember that she left me on the mantelpiece!’

“I looked up, and then discovered above me . . . above me resting on a high mantelpiece—a bust.

“It was this bust which had been speaking. It resembled Gérard. It was Gérard’s body. It had been placed there as people are wont to place busts on mantelpieces. It was a bust like those carved by sculptors, that is to say, it was without arms.

“ ‘I can’t shake hands with you, my dear Michel,’ the voice went on, ‘for as you see I have no hands, but if you raise yourself on tiptoe you will be able to take me in your arms and place me on the table. My wife put me up here in a moment of temper, because she said I was in the way when she swept the room. She’s a funny thing is my wife.’

“And the bust burst out laughing.

“It seemed to me that I was the victim of an optical illusion as happens in those entertain-

ments where you behold living heads and shoulders suspended in mid-air, the result of tricks with mirrors; but after setting down my friend on the table, as he requested, I had to admit that this head and body without arms or legs was indeed all that remained of the excellent officer whom I had known in days gone by. His body was resting on a small wheeled platform, such as are used by cripples without legs, but Gérard did not possess even the stumps of legs which can be seen in the case of most cripples. To think that my old friend was nothing but a bust!

“Small hooks took the place of arms, and language fails me to describe how, leaning for support on a hook here, or on another there, he set to work to hop, skip and jump and perform a hundred swift movements which shot him from the table to a chair, from a chair to the floor, and then suddenly made him appear on the table once more, where he indulged in the gayest chatter.

“Myself, I was in a state of consternation. I was rendered speechless. I watched this

freak perform his antics and say with a chuckle which alarmed me:

“‘I have greatly changed I daresay. You must admit, my dear Michel, that you hardly recognize me. You did quite right to call this evening. We shall see some sport. We have a few very special friends, and, you know, apart from them I don’t care to meet any one—merely as a matter of pride. We don’t even keep a servant. Wait for me here. I must get into my smoking jacket.’

“He went off, and almost at once the lady of the lamp appeared. She wore the same low-necked dress of the year before. As soon as her eyes fell upon me, she seemed strangely perturbed, and said in a strained voice:

“‘Oh, so you are here! You’ve made a mistake, Captain Michel. I gave your message to my husband, but I forbade you to call this evening. I may tell you that when he learnt that you were in this place, he asked me to invite you this evening, but I did no such thing because,’ she went on, ill at ease, ‘I had good reasons. We have certain very particular friends who are rather a worry—they are very



fond of noise—uproar. You must have heard them last year,’ she added, giving me a look out of the corner of her eye. ‘Well, promise me to leave early.’

“ ‘I promise to leave early, madame,’ I returned, and yet a vague misgiving took possession of me at this conversation, the meaning of which I was far from understanding. ‘I promise you faithfully, but can you tell me how it is that I find my old friend in such a state? What terrible accident happened to him?’

“ ‘None at all, monsieur, none.’

“ ‘What do you mean, “none at all”? Don’t you know anything about the accident which deprived him of arms and legs? Yet he must have met with it since your marriage.’

“ ‘No, monsieur, no. I married the captain as he is now . . . But excuse me, our guests will be here presently, and I must help my husband to put on his smoking jacket.’

“She left me to myself, dazed by the one stupefying thought: ‘She married the captain as he is now!’ and almost at once I heard sounds in the hall, the curious sounds which had accompanied the lady of the lamp to the garden

gate and baffled me last year. This noise was followed by the appearance, on their wheeled platforms, of four cripples without arms or legs who stared at me in wonder. They were all attired in perfectly-fitting evening dress with snow-white shirt fronts.

“One wore gold-rimmed pince-nez, another, an old man, spectacles, the third a single eyeglass, and the fourth was content to gaze at me out of his own proud, shrewd eyes with an expression of boredom. All four, however, saluted me with their little hooks, and asked after Captain Beauvisage. I told them that he was dressing, and Madame Beauvisage was quite well. When I took the liberty of speaking of Madame Beauvisage, I caught an exchange of glances between them which seemed to embody a certain raillery.

“‘Haw, haw, I presume you are a great friend of our good old captain,’ drawled the cripple with the monocle.

“The others smiled with a look which was by no means pleasant, and then they all started to talk in the same breath:

“‘Sorry, sorry, monsieur . . . We are quite

naturally surprised to meet you at the house of the good old captain, who swore on his wedding day to shut himself up in the country with his wife, and not to receive any one—any one but his very special friends, you understand. When one is so thoroughly a cripple as the captain consented to be, and is married to such a beautiful woman, it is quite natural—quite natural. But, after all, if in the course of his life he met a man of honor who does not happen to be a cripple, we're glad of it . . . We congratulate you.'

"And they repeated: 'We're glad of it . . . We congratulate you.'

"Lord how odd they were, these dwarfs! I watched them and held my peace. Others arrived in twos and threes and so on. And they all contemplated me with a look of surprise or uneasiness or irony. For my part I was rendered speechless by the spectacle of so many cripples without arms or legs; for after all I was beginning to see through most of the extraordinary happenings which had so greatly stirred my mind; and though the cripples, by their presence, explained many things, the

presence of the cripples still required explanation, as also did the monstrous union of that splendid woman with that awful shred of humanity.

"True, I realized now that these little ambulating trunks were bound to pass unperceived by me in the narrow garden path lined with verberna, and the road running between two low hedges; and, truth to tell, when at the time I said to myself that it was impossible to avoid seeing any person going down those paths, I had in mind persons who would be standing upright on their two legs.

"The handle of the garden gate itself no longer puzzled me, and in my mind's eye I saw the invisible hook which had turned it.

"The peculiar noise which I heard was but the creaking made by the small badly oiled wheels of these cars for freaks. Finally, the extraordinary sound like the thunderous beating of a wooden drum, was obviously caused by the many cars and hooks striking the floor when, after an excellent dinner, our friends the cripples indulged in a dance.

"Yes, all this was capable of explanation,

but I was conscious as I caught a curious eager gleam in their eyes, and heard the peculiar sound of their nippers, that something terrible still remained to be cleared up, and that all else which had surprised me was of no account.

“Meanwhile Madame Beauvisage promptly appeared, accompanied by her husband. They were greeted with shouts of delight. The little hooks ‘applauded’ them with an infernal din. I was deafened by it. Then I was introduced. Cripples were all over the place: on the tables, chairs, stools, on stands usually occupied by vases, on the sideboard. One of them sat on the shelf of a dresser like a Buddha in his recess. And each one politely held out his hook to me. They seemed for the most part people of good position, with titles and names indicating their relationship to aristocratic families, but I learned afterwards that these were false names given to me for reasons which will be obvious. Lord Wilmer certainly maintained the best front of them all, with his fine golden beard and no less fine mustache which he continually stroked with his hook. He did not leap from chair to table like the others, nor did

he have the air of a huge bat taking wing from wall to wall.

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“‘We are only waiting for the doctor,’ said the mistress of the house, who every now and then gave me a look of obvious gloom, but quickly resumed her smile for her guests.

“The doctor arrived. He was a cripple but he possessed both arms.

“He offered one of them to Madame Beauvisage and led her to the dining-room. I mean that she touched his arm with the tips of her fingers.

“Covers were laid in the room with the closed shutters. The table, which was laden with flowers and *hors d'œuvre*, was illuminated by a large candelabrum. There was no fruit. The dozen cripples at once leapt upon their chairs and began to pick greedily from the dishes with their hooks. It was not a pleasant sight, and I marveled at the voracity with which these trunks of men, who seemed just before so well-mannered, devoured their food.

“And then suddenly they quietened down;

their hooks kept still, and it seemed to me that they lapsed into what is usually described as a 'painful silence.'

"Every eye was turned on Madame Beauvisage, whose husband sat by her side, and I noticed that she buried her face in her napkin, looking very uncomfortable. Then my friend Gérard, clapping one hook against the other with a flourish, said:

" 'Well, my dear old friends, it can't be helped. One doesn't meet the luck of last year every day. But don't distress yourselves. With the exercise of a little imagination we shall succeed in being as merry as we were then. . . . '

"And turning to me as he lifted the small handle of the glass which stood on the table before him:

" 'Your health my dear Michel. To us all!'

"And each man raised his glass by its handle with the end of his hook. The glasses swung over the table in the quaintest fashion.

"My host went on:

" 'You don't seem to be equal to the occasion, my dear Michel. I have known you in merrier

mood, more up to the mark. Is it because we are "like this" that you are so gloomy? What do you expect? We are what we are. But let us have some amusement. We are met together here, all of us very special friends, to celebrate the time when we became "like this." Is that not true my friends of the *Daphné*? . . .'

"Then my old comrade," Captain Michel went on to explain, heaving a deep sigh, "told us how the *Daphné*, which sailed between France and the Far East, was wrecked; how the crew escaped in the boats, and how these miserable people took refuge on a chance raft.

"Miss Madge, a beautiful young girl who lost her parents in the catastrophe, was also picked up by the raft. Some thirteen persons in all were on it, and at the end of three days the victuals were consumed, and at the end of a week the survivors were dying of hunger. It was then that, as the old song says, they agreed to draw lots as to 'which should be eaten.'

"Messieurs," added Captain Michel, in a serious voice, "such things have happened more often perhaps than they have been talked



about, for the great blue waters close over these peculiar feats of digestion.

"They were on the point, therefore, of drawing lots on the raft when the doctor's voice was heard: 'Mesdames and Messieurs,' said the doctor, 'you have lost all your belongings in the wreck of the ship, but I have saved my case of instruments and my forceps for arresting hemorrhage. This is my suggestion: There is no object in any one of us running the risk of being eaten as a whole. Let us, to begin with, draw lots for an arm or leg at will, and we will then see to-morrow what the day brings forth, and perhaps a sail may appear on the horizon.' "

At this point in Captain Michel's story the four old salts, who up to this had not interrupted, cried:

"Well done!"

"What do you mean 'well done'?" asked Captain Michel with a frown.

"Yes, 'well done!' Your story is a good joke. These people were ready to lose an arm or leg in turn . . . That's a good joke, but there's nothing frightful about it."

"So you really find it a good joke!" growled the Captain, bristling with annoyance. "Well, I swear that if you had been seated among all those cripples whose eyes were bulging like live coal, and heard the story, you wouldn't have found it such a good joke . . . And if you had noticed how restless they were in their chairs! And how vigorously they clasped hooks across the table with an obvious delight which I couldn't make out, but which was none the less frightful for all that."

"No, no," broke in Chanlieu once more—that old fellow Chanlieu—"your story is not in the least frightful. It is funny simply because it is logical. Would you like me to tell you the end of the story? You shall say whether I am right or not. The people on the raft drew lots. The lot fell to Miss Madge who was to lose one of her beautiful limbs. Your friend the captain, who is a gentleman, offered his own instead, and he had his four limbs amputated so that Miss Madge should remain unscathed."

"Yes, old man, you've got it. That is so," exclaimed Captain Michel, who felt a longing to break the heads of these imbeciles who

treated his story as a good joke. "Yes, and what's more, when it was a question of cutting off Miss Madge's limbs after the survivors, except the young lady and the doctor—who had been left with both arms because they were wanted—had lost all their limbs, Captain Beauvisage had the pluck to have the poor stumps left from the first operation, cut off on a level with his body."

"And the young lady could do no other than offer the Captain her hand which he had so heroically saved," interposed Zinzin.

"Why, of course," growled the Captain in his beard. "And you consider it a good joke?"

"Did they eat all those limbs quite raw?" inquired that ass of a Bagatelle.

Captain Michel struck the table such a resounding blow that the glasses danced like rubber balls.

"That'll do, shut up," he exclaimed. "All that I've told you is nothing. Now comes the frightful part of it."

The four friends looked at each other smiling, and Captain Michel grew pale, whereupon

seeing that they had carried matters too far they hung their heads.

“Yes, the frightful part of it,” went on Michel with his gloomiest air, “was that these people who were only rescued a month later by a Chinese sailing vessel which landed them somewhere on the Yang-Tse-Kiang where they separated—the frightful part of it was that these people retained a taste for human flesh, and when they returned to Europe arranged to meet together once a year to renew as far as possible the abominable banquet. Well, messieurs, it did not take me long to find that out! First of all there was the scarcely enthusiastic reception accorded to certain dishes, which Madame Beauvisage herself brought to the table. Though she ventured to claim, but with no great assurance, that they were pretty nearly the same thing, the guests were of one mind in abstaining from congratulating her. Only certain slices of tunny-fish were received with any sort of favor, because they were, to use the doctor’s terrible expression, ‘well cut,’ and, ‘if the flavor was not entirely satisfactory at all events the eye was deceived.’ But the

cripple with the spectacles met with general approval when he declared that 'it was not equal to the plumber.'

"When I heard those words I felt my blood run cold," growled Captain Michel huskily, "for I remembered that about this time the year before a plumber had fallen from a roof near the Arsenal and was killed, and his body was picked up minus an arm.

"Then . . . O then . . . I could not help thinking of the part which my beautiful neighbor must, of necessity, have played in this horrible, culinary drama. I turned my eyes to her and I noticed that she had put on her gloves again, gloves which covered her arms to the shoulder, and also hastily thrown a wrap over her shoulders which wholly concealed them. The guest on my right, who was the doctor, and, as I have said, was the only man among the cripples with both arms intact, had also put on his gloves.

"Instead of bothering my head in vain to discover the reason of this fresh eccentricity, I should have done better to follow the advice which Madame Beauvisage gave me at the be-

ginning of this infernal party, namely, to leave the place early—advice which she did not repeat.

“After showing an interest in me during the first part of this amazing feast in which I seemed to discern—I don’t know why—a sort of pity, Madame Beauvisage now avoided looking at me and took a part which greatly grieved me in the most frightful conversation which I have ever heard. These little people with a vigorous clatter of nippers and clinking of glasses indulged in bitter recriminations or warm congratulations with regard to their peculiar appetite.

“To my horror Lord Wilmer, who until then had been most correct, nearly ‘came to hooks’ with the cripple with the monocle, because the latter had once on the raft complained of the former being tough, and the mistress of the house had the greatest difficulty in putting things in their true light by retorting to the monocled bust, who was obviously at the time of the shipwreck a good-looking stripling, that neither was it particularly agreeable to have to put up with ‘an animal that was too young.’ ”

"That's also funny," the old salt Dorat could not help interjecting.

It looked as if Captain Michel would fly at his throat, particularly as the three other mariners seemed to be shaking with inward joy and gave vent to queer little clucks. It was as much as the Captain could do to control himself. After puffing like a seal he turned to the foolhardy Dorat:

"Monsieur you have two arms still, and I have no wish for you to lose one of them, as I did on that particular night, to make you see the frightful part of the story. The cripples had drunk a great deal. Some of them jumped on the table round me, and were gazing at my arms in a very embarrassing manner and I ended by hiding them from sight as far as possible by thrusting my hands deep into my pockets.

"I realized then, and it was a startling thought, why Madame Beauvisage and the doctor, the two persons who still had arms and hands, did not show them. I grasped the meaning of the sudden ferocity which blazed in the eyes of some of them. And at that very

moment, as luck would have it, I wanted to use my pocket handkerchief, and instinctively I made a movement which revealed the whiteness of my skin under my sleeve, and three terrible hooks swooped down at once on my wrist and entered my flesh. I uttered a fearful shriek."

"That'll do, Captain, that'll do," I exclaimed, interrupting Captain Michel's story. "You were quite right. I'm off. I can't stand any more."

"Stay, monsieur," said the Captain in a peremptory tone. "Stay, monsieur, for I shall soon finish this frightful story which has made four imbeciles laugh. When a man has Phocæan blood in his veins," he added with an accent of unspeakable contempt turning to the four ancient mariners who were obviously choking in their efforts to keep back their laughter, "when a man has Phocæan blood in his veins, he can't get over it."

"And when a man lives in Marseilles he is doomed never to believe in anything. So it is for you, for you alone, monsieur, that I am telling this story, and, be assured, I will pass



over the most loathsome details, knowing as I do how much the mind of a gentleman can bear. The tragedy of my martyrdom proceeded so quickly that I can call to mind only their inhuman cries, the protests of some and the rush of others while Madame Beauvisage stood up and murmured:

“Be careful not to hurt him!”

“I tried to leap to my feet, but by this time a posse of mad cripples was round me who tripped me up and I crashed to the floor. And I felt their awful hooks hold my flesh captive just as the meat in a butcher’s shop is held captive on its hooks.

“Yes, monsieur, I will spare you the details. I pledged you my word; all the more so as I couldn’t give them to you, for I did not see the operation. The doctor clapped a plug of cotton wool steeped in chloroform on my mouth by way of a gag.

“When I came to myself I was in the kitchen, and I had lost an arm. The cripples were all around me. They had ceased their wrangling. They seemed to be united in the most touching harmony; in reality they were

in a state of dazed intoxication which caused them to sway their heads like children who feel the need to go and lie down after eating their fill, and I had not a doubt but that they were beginning, alas! to digest me . . . I was stretched at full length on the floor, securely bound, and deprived of all power of movement, but I could both see and hear them. My old comrade, Gérard Beauvisage, had tears of joy in his eyes as he exclaimed:

“‘I should never have thought you would be so tender!’

“Madame Beauvisage was not present, but she, too, must have taken part in the feast, for I heard some one ask Gérard how ‘she liked her share.’

“Yes, monsieur, I have finished my story. I have finished my story. Those loathsome cripples having satisfied their weakness, must have at last realized the full extent of their iniquity. They made themselves scarce, and Madame Beauvisage, of course, escaped with them. They left the doors wide open but no one came to set me free until four days after-

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**wards, when I was pretty well dead with  
hunger . . .**

**“Those miserable wretches had not even left  
the bone behind!”**

# **THE GOLD AXE**



## THE GOLD AXE

**M**ANY years ago I was at Gersau, a small health resort on the Lake of the Four Forest Cantons, a few miles from Lucerne. I wanted to complete certain work, and I had arranged to spend the autumn in the quiet of this delightful village whose ancient pointed roofs were reflected in the romantic waters of the lake on which William Tell sailed in days of old.

It was the end of autumn, and tourists had scattered, while the many hideous Tartarins who had descended upon us from Germany with their alpenstocks, their puttees and their little round hats decked with the indispensable feather, had returned to their lager beer, their sauerkraut and their "big concerts," leaving the country between Pilatus, the Mythen and the Rigi free to us at last.

Not more than half-a-dozen of us foregathered in the hotel at meal time, and when

evening came related our experiences of the day or indulged in a little music.

An old lady, always enveloped in deep mourning, who when the little hotel was swarming with noisy visitors had never addressed a word to any one, and seemed the embodiment of woe, stood revealed as a pianist of the first rank, and without waiting to be pressed, played Chopin to us and, in particular, a certain lullaby by Schumann which she rendered with such exquisite tenderness that she brought tears to our eyes.

We were all so grateful to her for the pleasant hours which she enabled us to pass, that we joined together to present her, at the moment of her departure, with a slight souvenir of our stay at Gersau.

One of us who went that day to Lucerne undertook to buy the gift. He returned in the evening with a gold brooch in the form of a small axe.

Neither on that evening nor the following one did the old lady make her appearance; and the visitors who were leaving entrusted the gold brooch to my care.

Her luggage was still in the hotel, and I was prepared to see her return, sooner or later, reassured as to her well-being by the proprietor who told me that she was in the habit of disappearing for a day or two, and he had no reason to feel anxious about her.

As a matter of fact the day before my departure, as I was making a final tour of the lake and had pulled up a few steps from Tell's Chapel, I saw the old lady standing at the entrance of the building.

Never until then had I been impressed by the unspeakable distress depicted on her face down which the tears were coursing, and never had I so clearly observed the traces, which were still manifest, of her former beauty. She caught sight of me, lowered her veil, and walked toward the lake. Nevertheless, I did not hesitate to overtake her, and bowing, expressed the visitors' regret that we were about to lose her; and then, as I had the gift on me, I presented her with the small case containing the gold axe.

She opened it with a sweet, far-away smile, but no sooner did she perceive the jewel inside



than she began to tremble with emotion, and drew back some distance from me, as though she had something to fear from my presence, and with an insensate gesture threw the brooch into the lake.

I displayed so much amazement at this unaccountable reception that she begged my forgiveness and burst into a fit of sobbing. A seat stood in this secluded spot, and we both sat down. And after a few lamentations against the decrees of fate which left me quite at a loss, she confided to me her strange, melancholy story which I was never to forget. For, in truth, I know of no more terrible destiny than that which befell the old lady in the black veil, who had played Schumann's lullaby to us with such exquisite emotion.

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"I will tell you the whole story," she said, "for I am about to leave for ever this country which I determined to visit for the last time. And then you will understand why it was that I threw the little gold axe into the lake.

"I was born in Geneva, monsieur. We be-

longed to one of the leading families and were rich, but some unfortunate speculations on the stock exchange ruined my father, who died from the shock. When I was eighteen I was a beautiful girl without a dowry. My mother gave up all hope of marrying me. And yet she yearned to make sure of my future before she went to join my father.

"I was twenty-four when a suitor whom every one looked upon as an unhopd-for chance appeared.

"A young man from Briesgau who was accustomed to spend the summer in Switzerland and whose acquaintance we made in the casino at Evian, fell in love with me, and I liked him. Herbert Gutmann was a tall young fellow, kindly, unobtrusive and good-natured. He seemed to unite qualities alike of heart and mind. He possessed a certain affluence without being actually wealthy. His father was still engaged in business, and made him an allowance in order that he might travel until the time came for him to succeed him in his business. We were all intending to visit the elder Gutmann at his place in Todtnau, in the

Black Forest, when the state of my mother's health greatly hastened the course of events.

"Conscious that she no longer possessed the physical strength to travel, my mother hurriedly returned to Geneva, where she received from the civil authorities of Todtnau, to whom she had written, the most satisfactory information in respect of Herbert and his family. Herbert's father had begun life as an ordinary woodcutter, and then had left the district, returning to it with a small fortune which he had 'made in timber.' That was all, at least, that was known of him in Todtnau.

"This was enough to induce my mother to press forward the formalities of my marriage, which took place a week before her death. She died with her mind at rest for, as she said, she felt 'reassured about my future.'

"My husband helped me to overcome the grief which this sore trial caused me by his constant goodness and solicitude. Before we set out for Todtnau we came here to Gersau to spend a week, and then to my great surprise we undertook a long journey instead of making our visit to Herbert's father. My sorrow

would have gradually been dispelled if, as the days sped by, I had not noticed, almost with dismay, that my husband was more and more becoming a prey to melancholy.

“I was more surprised than I can express, because Herbert had seemed to me of a humorous disposition, open, unrestrained and extremely frank. Was I to discover that the liveliness which he used to display was forced, and veiled some deep mortification? Alas, his sighs when he thought himself alone, and the agitation which sometimes disturbed his night’s rest, scarcely left room for doubt, and I made up my mind to question him.

“At the first word that I ventured to speak on the subject he made answer by bursting into laughter, treating me as a silly little goose and kissing me passionately, which merely served to strengthen my conviction that I was in the presence of some painful mystery.

“I could not hide from myself that there was something in Herbert’s demeanor which was very like ‘remorse.’ And yet I could have sworn that he was incapable of committing, I

will not say a low or mean action, but even one lacking in propriety.

“It was then that the fate which had dogged my footsteps, struck us another blow in the person of my father-in-law of whose death we learnt whilst we were in Scotland. This grievous piece of news depressed my husband more than I can say. He remained the whole night without uttering a word, nor did he shed tears nor appear to listen to the words of consolation by which I, in my turn, endeavored to rouse his spirit. He seemed to be overwhelmed. At last, when the light was beginning to dawn, he rose from the arm-chair in which he had sat huddled, and turning toward me a face terribly distorted by suffering, said in a harrowing voice:

“ ‘Come, Elizabeth, we shall have to go back. We shall have to go back.’ ”

“These words seemed to possess a significance from the tone in which they were spoken which I failed to understand. A return to the land of his father’s was quite natural at a moment like that, and I could not see why he should fight against the necessity of going

home. From that day onward Herbert changed completely; he grew extraordinarily silent, and more than once I came upon him sobbing wildly.

“The grief which the loss of a beloved father might occasion could not entirely explain the horror of our position, for there is nothing more terrible than mystery, the deep mystery which steals in between two beings who are devoted to each other, and separates them from their happiness. . . .

“We reached Todtnau in time to breathe a prayer over the newly made grave.

“This little town in the Black Forest, at no great distance from Höllenthal, was a dreary spot; and there was scarcely any society in it for me. The Gutmann’s house, in which we took up our abode, lay on the borders of a forest.

“It was a gloomy chalet standing in its own grounds, and our one visitor was an old clock-maker in the place, who was said to be rich and had been the elder Gutmann’s friend. He appeared from time to time at the lunch or dinner hour, in order to get himself invited.

"I had no liking for this manufacturer of cuckoo-clocks, this petty usurer, for though he was rich, he was a miser and incapable of the least nicety of feeling. Nor did Herbert care for Frantz Basckler, though he continued out of respect for the memory of his father to keep on friendly terms with him.

"Basckler, who had no children, had told the elder Gutmann times out of number that Herbert was his only heir. Herbert spoke to me about it one day with the most sincere aversion, and I had once more an opportunity of appreciating the strictness of his conscience.

" 'Would you like to be the heir of this sordid old miser who made his fortune by ruining all the clockmakers in Höllenthal?'

" 'Certainly not,' I returned. 'Your father left us a certain amount of property, and with what you can honestly earn we shall have enough to live on even if Heaven chooses to send us a child.'

"I had no sooner uttered these words than I saw my Herbert turn as white as a sheet. I put my arms round him, for I thought that

he was about to faint, but the blood returned to his face, and he exclaimed in forcible tones:

“‘Yes, yes, the only true thing is to have the approbation of one’s conscience.’

“And so saying he rushed wildly from the room.

“Sometimes he was away for a day or two on business, which consisted, he told me, of buying plantations of standing trees and selling them again to contractors. He did not work the whole thing himself but left to others the task of turning the trees into sleepers for railways, if the wood was of inferior quality, and posts and ships’ masts if it was of the best quality. The essential thing was to display expert judgment; and he had acquired his knowledge of timber from his father.

“He never took me away with him on any of his journeys. He left me alone in the house with an old maid-servant who had received me with ill-disguised hostility. I kept out of her way and wept in secret, for I was not happy. I felt convinced that Herbert was hiding something from me, something which was obsessing his mind, and which I too who knew



nothing, was never able to dismiss from my thoughts.

“And then the great forest frightened me. And the servant frightened me. And old Basckler frightened me. And the old house! It was very large with staircases everywhere leading to passages into which I dared not venture. At the end of one of them in particular, stood a small room. I had seen my husband enter it two or three times, but I myself had never set foot in it.

“I could not pass the door of this room, which was always closed, without a tremor. It was to this study that Herbert was wont to retire, so he told me, to make up his accounts and balance his books, but it was also to this room that he retired alone to bewail his secret.

“One night after he had set out on one of his journeys and I was vainly endeavoring to sleep, my attention was attracted by a slight sound under my window which I had left partly open on account of the extreme heat. I got out of bed with every precaution. The sky was overcast and great clouds hid the stars from sight. It was as much as I could do to

discern the threatening shadows of the nearest trees which faced the house.

“I could not clearly distinguish my husband and the maid-servant until they passed under my window, walking on the lawn with infinite caution so that I should not hear the sound of their footsteps and carrying between them a sort of long, somewhat narrow trunk which I had never before seen. They entered the chalet and I did not hear nor see them again for the next ten minutes.

“My anguish exceeded anything that it is possible to conceive. Why were they hiding themselves from me? How was it that I had not heard the coming of the chaise which usually brought Herbert home? Just then I seemed to catch in the distance the neighing of a horse, and the maid-servant appeared, crossed the lawn, vanished into the darkness, and soon returned leading our mare unharnessed over the soft ground. Never had they taken so many precautions to prevent me from waking up!

“Growing more and more surprised that Herbert did not come to our room as was his

custom after his return at night, I hastily slipped on a dressing-gown and wandered into the darkness of the passage. My steps turned quite naturally toward the little study of which I stood in so much fear. And I had only just entered the corridor which led to it when I heard my husband say in a rough, muffled voice to the maid-servant who was mounting the stairs:

“‘Water! Bring me some water. Hot water of course. It won’t come off.’

“I stopped short and held my breath. Besides I could not breathe. I was stifling. I was filled with the presentiment that some dreadful misfortune had befallen us. Suddenly I was once more startled by my husband’s voice:

“‘Ah, at last! That’s done it. It’s come off.’

“My husband and the old woman were still talking in low tones and I heard his step. That brought me to myself and I fled to my bedroom and locked myself in. Soon he knocked at the door and I went through the form of pretending to be asleep and to wake

up, and at last I opened the door. I held a candle in my hand which fell to the floor when I caught sight of the look on his face.

“‘What’s the matter?’” he asked. ‘Are you still asleep? Do go back to bed.’

“I made a movement to light the candle again, but he stopped me and I threw myself on the bed. I spent a cruel night.

“Herbert turned and tossed and sighed beside me and could not sleep. He did not speak a word. At daybreak he rose, pressed an icy kiss on my brow and left the room. When I got downstairs the old woman gave me a note from him in which he stated that he was obliged to go away again for a couple of days.

“At eight o’clock that morning I learned from workmen on their way to Neustadt, that old Basckler had been found murdered in a small cottage which he possessed at Höllenthal, where he sometimes spent the night when his business of money-lending kept him too long among his peasant-debtors. Basckler had received a terrible blow with an axe which had split his head in two. It was undoubtedly the work of a woodman.

"I returned to the house as best I could. And once more my feet led me toward the little study. I could not explain exactly what was passing in my mind, but after the words which I had overheard during the night and the look on Herbert's face, I felt a need to see what that room contained. Just then the servant observed me and exclaimed maliciously:

"'Leave that room alone. You know quite well that M. Gutmann has forbidden you to touch it. A lot of good it would do you to know what's inside.'

"And she walked away with a fiendish laugh.

"I took my bed, suffering from high fever. I was ill for a fortnight. Herbert looked after me with maternal solicitude. It seemed to me that I had been the sport of some evil dream, and it was enough now to see his good-natured face to confirm my impression that I was not in a normal condition on the night when I fancied that I had seen and heard so many extraordinary things. Moreover the murderer of Basckler had been arrested. He was a woodman belonging to Bergen whom the old miser had 'bled' too freely and who had taken his

revenge by 'bleeding' his persecutor in his turn.

"This woodman, a man named Mathis Müller, never ceased to protest his innocence, but though not a single trace of blood was found on his clothes and his axe was almost like new steel, there was, it seems, sufficient evidence of his guilt to bring him to justice.

"Our circumstances were in no way affected, as we imagined they might be, by old Basckler's death, and Herbert looked in vain for a will which did not exist.

"To my surprise its absence considerably upset him, and one day when I questioned him about it he answered irritably:

" 'Well, yes, if you want to know, I was relying a great deal on that will—a great deal.

"And as he spoke a black look came over his face, and the terrible face which I had seen on the mysterious night rose up before me, and after that never left me. It was like a mask which I was always ready to place over Herbert's face even when it was naturally kind and sad.

"During Mathis Müller's trial at Freiburg I eagerly read the newspapers; and certain

words which fell from the counsel for the defense haunted me day and night:

“‘Until you have discovered the axe with which the deed was done and the murderer’s blood-stained clothes, you cannot convict Mathis Müller.’

“Nevertheless Mathis Müller was found guilty and sentenced to death, and I am bound to say that the verdict strangely affected my husband. At night he dreamt of nothing but Mathis Müller. I was terrified of him and my thoughts also terrified me.

“Oh, I longed to know the truth! I was determined to know the truth. What was the meaning of those words ‘It won’t come off?’

“What was the nature of the work upon which he was engaged in the mysterious little study during the night?

“One night I rose and groping in the dark stole his keys from him. I crept into the corridors. I went to the kitchen to fetch a lantern. With chattering teeth I reached the forbidden room . . . I opened the door and my eyes at once fell on the trunk—the oblong trunk which had so greatly perplexed me.

"It was locked, but I had no difficulty in finding the small key on the bunch . . . I unlocked it and raised the lid. I went down on my knees in order to see better, and the sight that met my eyes forced a cry of horror from me . . .

"The trunk contained blood-stained clothes and the axe which had struck the blow still spotted with rust . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

"How I managed, after what I had seen, to live with Herbert through the few weeks which preceded the convicted man's execution I cannot tell . . .

"I was afraid that he might kill me . . .

"How was it that my attitude, the dread that possessed me, failed to enlighten him? The fact is that at that time his mind was wholly a prey to fears not less great than my own. The thought of Mathis Müller never left him.

"To enable him to escape the obsession, apparently, he now shut himself up in the little study, and I sometimes heard him delivering tremendous blows, which made the floor and



walls resound, as if he were fighting with his axe against the ghosts and phantoms which beset him.

"Strange to say, and it seemed at first impossible to understand, Herbert recovered his calmness a couple of days before Müller's execution—the calmness of marble, the calmness of a statue. That evening he said:

"'I am going away to-morrow morning early. I have some important business to do near Freiburg. I shall probably be away for a couple of days. Don't worry.'

"It was at Freiburg that the execution was to take place, and I had the impression that Herbert's composure was the result of the resolution that he had taken.

"He was going to give himself up!

"The thought was so much of a relief to me that for the first time for many a night I fell into a sound sleep. It was broad daylight when I awoke. My husband had already left the house.

"I dressed in haste and without saying a word to the old servant I started for Todtnau. Here, I took a conveyance and drove to Frei-

burg. I reached Freiburg when the light had begun to wane. I went at once to the Court House, and the first person whom I saw entering the building was my husband. I stood rooted to the spot. And as Herbert did not come out again I felt sure that he had surrendered and was being held there at the disposal of the authorities.

"The prison at that time was next the Court House. I walked round it like a mad-woman. All that night I wandered about the streets, returning every now and then to this gloomy building, and the first gleams of day were beginning to break when my eyes encountered two men clad in black frock-coats mounting the front steps of the Court.

"I ran up to them and said that I wanted to see the public prosecutor as soon as possible, as I had a communication of the utmost gravity to make to him about the Basckler murder.

"As it happened, one of the gentlemen was the public prosecutor, and he invited me to accompany him to his office. Here I explained who I was and said that he must have received a visit from my husband the night before. He

told me that he had in fact seen him, and then as he took refuge in silence I threw myself on my knees before him beseeching him to have pity on me and tell me whether Herbert had confessed his crime. He seemed surprised, helped me to rise to my feet, and questioned me.

“Slowly I told him the story of my life, such as I have told it to you, and at last I described the awful discovery which I had made in the little study in the chalet at Todtnau. I ended by declaring that I should never have allowed an innocent man to be executed, and that had not my husband given himself up, I should not have hesitated to inform the police. And then I asked him as a final act of mercy, to be allowed to see Herbert.

“‘Yes, you shall see him, madame,’ he returned. ‘Please come with me.’

“He took me, more dead than alive, to the prison, through the corridors and up a staircase. Here he stood me before a small barred window which jutted over a large hall and left me, telling me to have patience. A number of other persons soon took up their positions

at this window, and looked into the hall without speaking.

"I did as they did. It was as though I was fastened to the bars, and I had the feeling that I was about to witness some monstrous spectacle.

"The hall was gradually lined with a number of persons all of whom maintained a mournful silence. Daylight now rendered the scene more visible. In the center of the hall we could clearly discern a heavy block of wood, and some one behind me exclaimed:

" 'That's the headman's block!'

"So Müller was to be executed! An icy perspiration began to trickle down my forehead, and I cannot say even now how it was that I did not fall into a dead faint. A door opened, and a procession appeared headed by the condemned man, quivering in his shirt which was cut low and showed his bare neck. His hands were bound behind his back, and he was supported by two warders. A minister of religion was murmuring in his ear.

"The wretched man began to speak. In a few trembling words he confessed his crime

and asked forgiveness of God and man. A civic officer took note of the confession and read out the sentence of the Court; and then the two warders thrust the convict on his knees and placed his head on the block.

“Mathis Müller might have already been dead for all the sign of life he gave, when a man with bare arms carrying an axe on his shoulder, stepped forward from the side where he had hitherto remained in the background.

“This man placed his hand upon the prisoner’s head, waived the two warders aside, lifted the axe and struck a terrible blow. Nevertheless he had to strike a second time before the head fell. Then he picked it up by the hair and stood erect.

“How was it that I was able to watch the unspeakably horrible sight until the end? Yet I could not remove my eyes from this scene of blood, and it seemed as though there was still something for me to see, and indeed my eyes did see . . . they saw, when holding in his shaking hand the abominable trophy the executioner drew himself up and raised his eyes.

"I uttered a piercing shriek, 'Herbert!' and fell unconscious.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Now, monsieur, you know my story. I had married the public executioner. The axe which I had discovered in the little study was the executioner's axe; the blood-stained clothes were the executioner's clothes.

"Next day I fled to the house of an old relative, and I very nearly lost my reason; and I don't know how it is that I am still in this world.

"As for my husband, who could not live without me, for he loved me more than anything on earth, he was found two months later hanging in our room. I received a last letter from him:

"'Forgive me, Elizabeth. I have tried every sort of occupation. I was dismissed as soon as it was discovered that I was the son of my father. I was forced at an early age to make up my mind to take up the succession of his work. You will understand now how it is that the office of public executioner descends

from father to son. I was born an honest man, and the only crime that I have ever committed in my life was to conceal the truth from you . . . Farewell! ”

\* \* \* \* \*

While I stood gazing in dumb amazement at the spot in the lake where the lady in black had thrown the little gold axe, she disappeared in the distance.

THE END







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